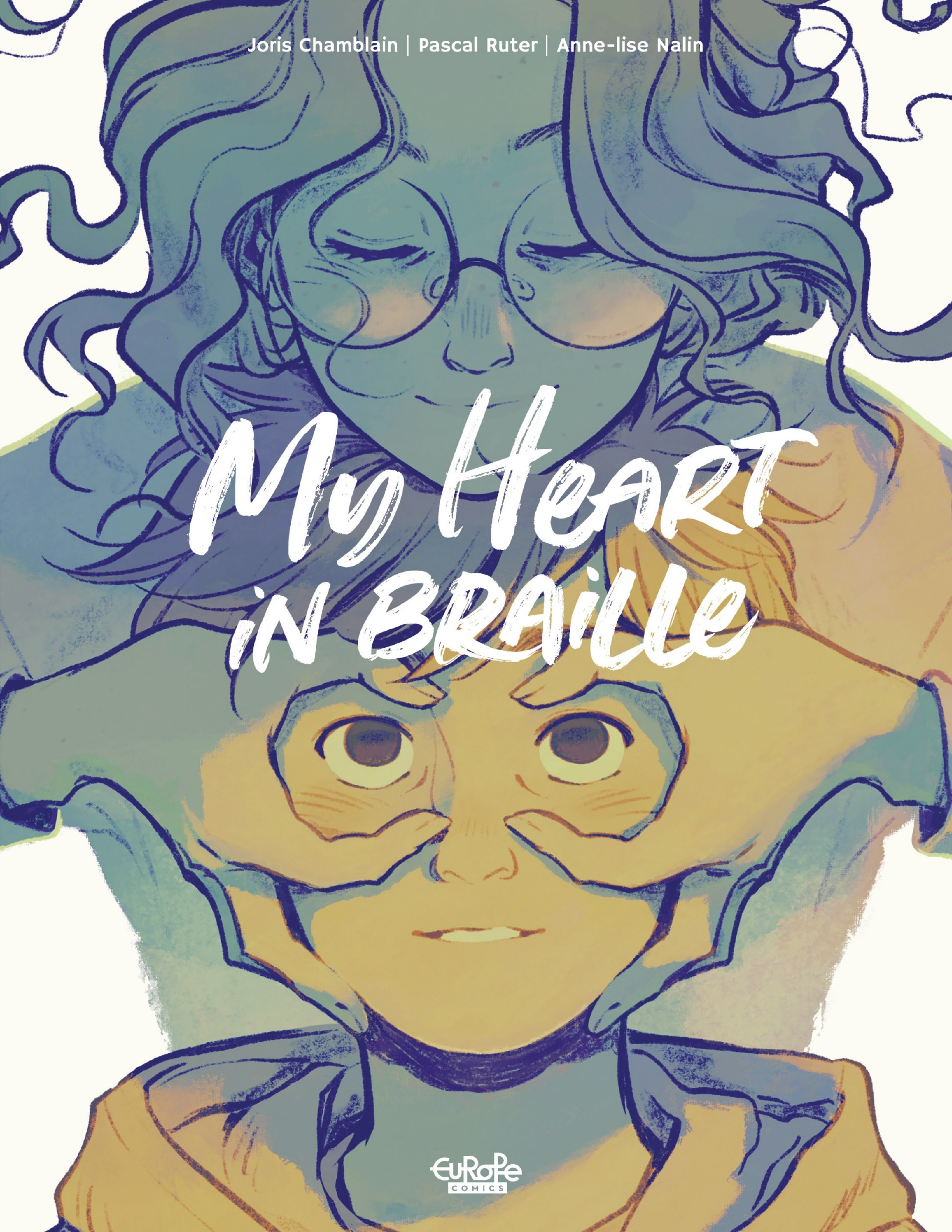
Joris Chamblain | Pascal Ruter | Anne-lise Nalin

My Heart in Braille

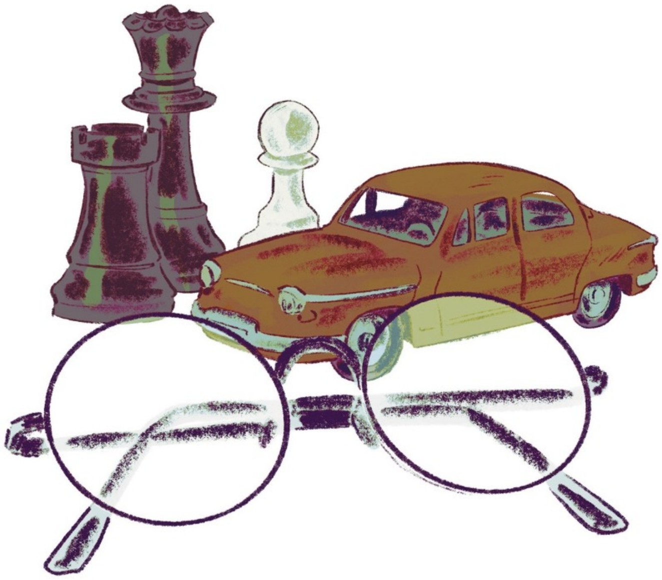


Europe Comics

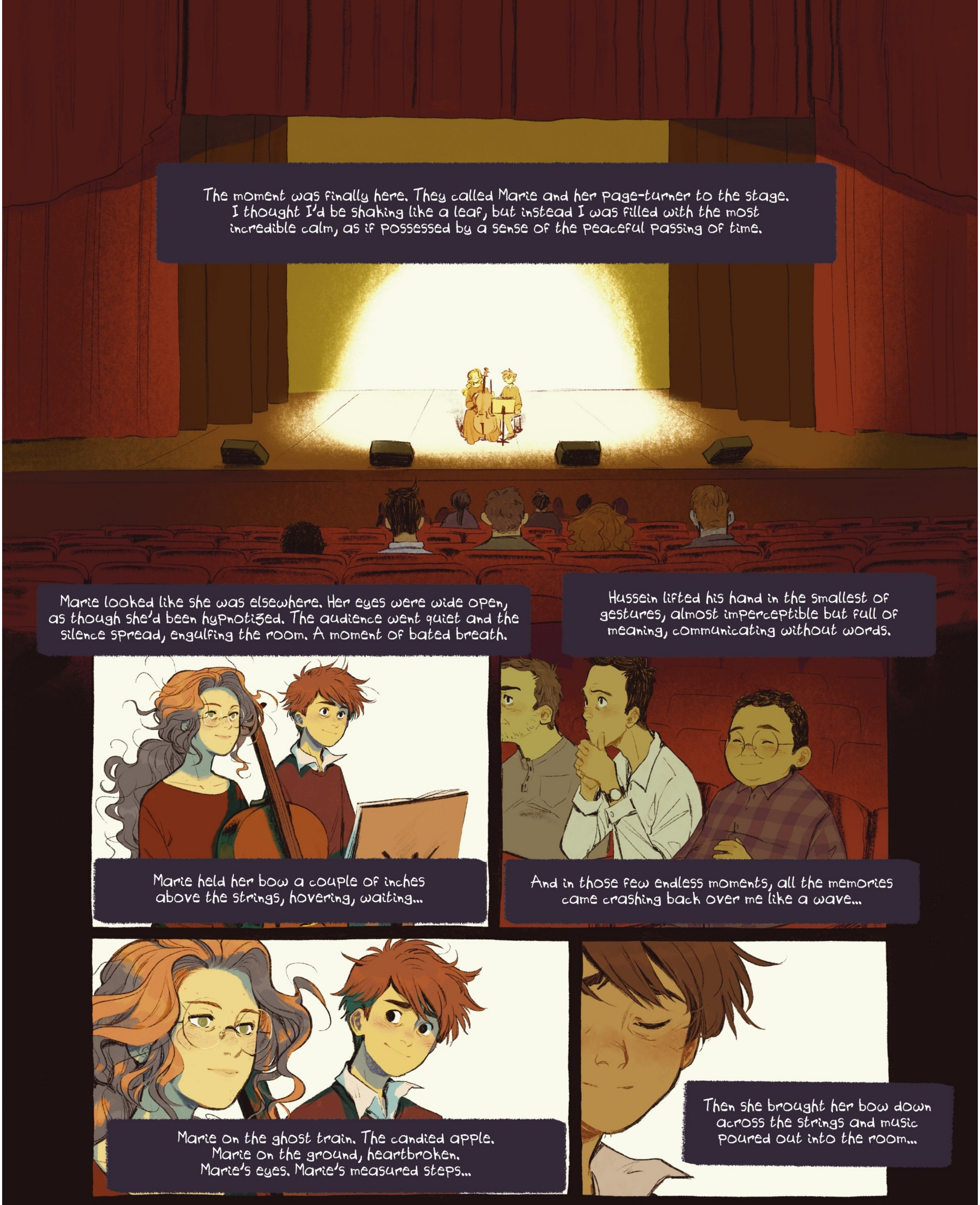
Writer:
Joris Chamblain

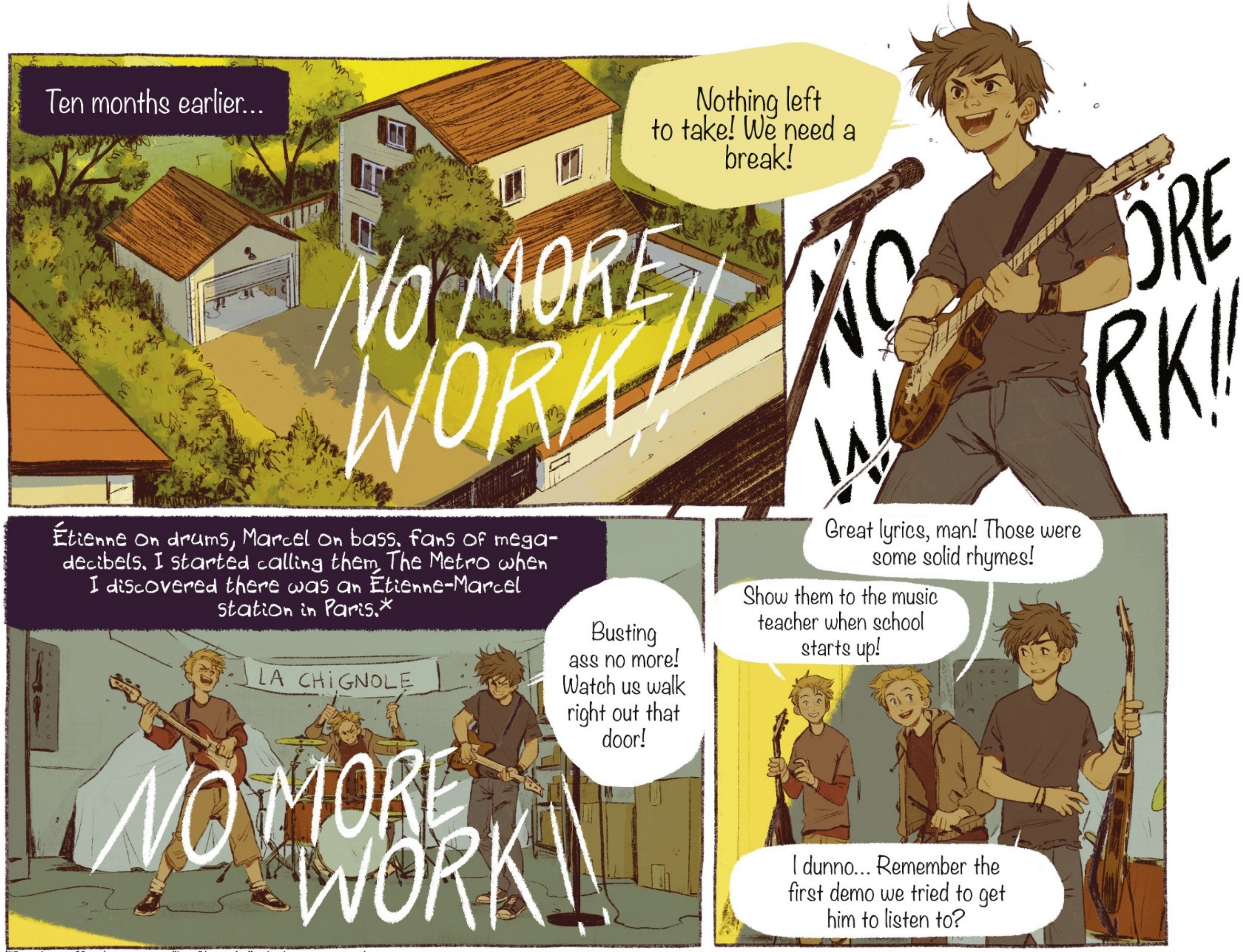
Artist and colorist:
Anne-lise Nalin

My Heart in Braille

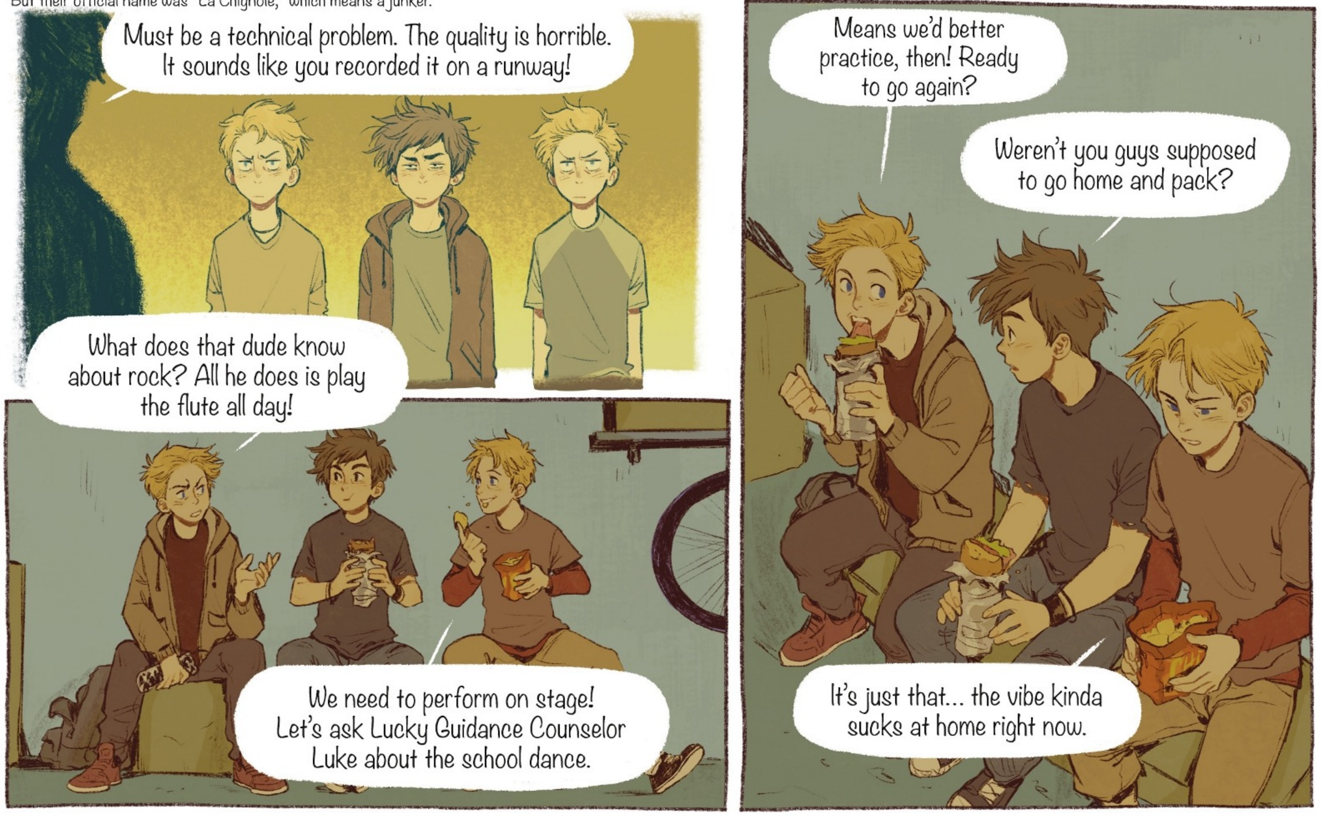


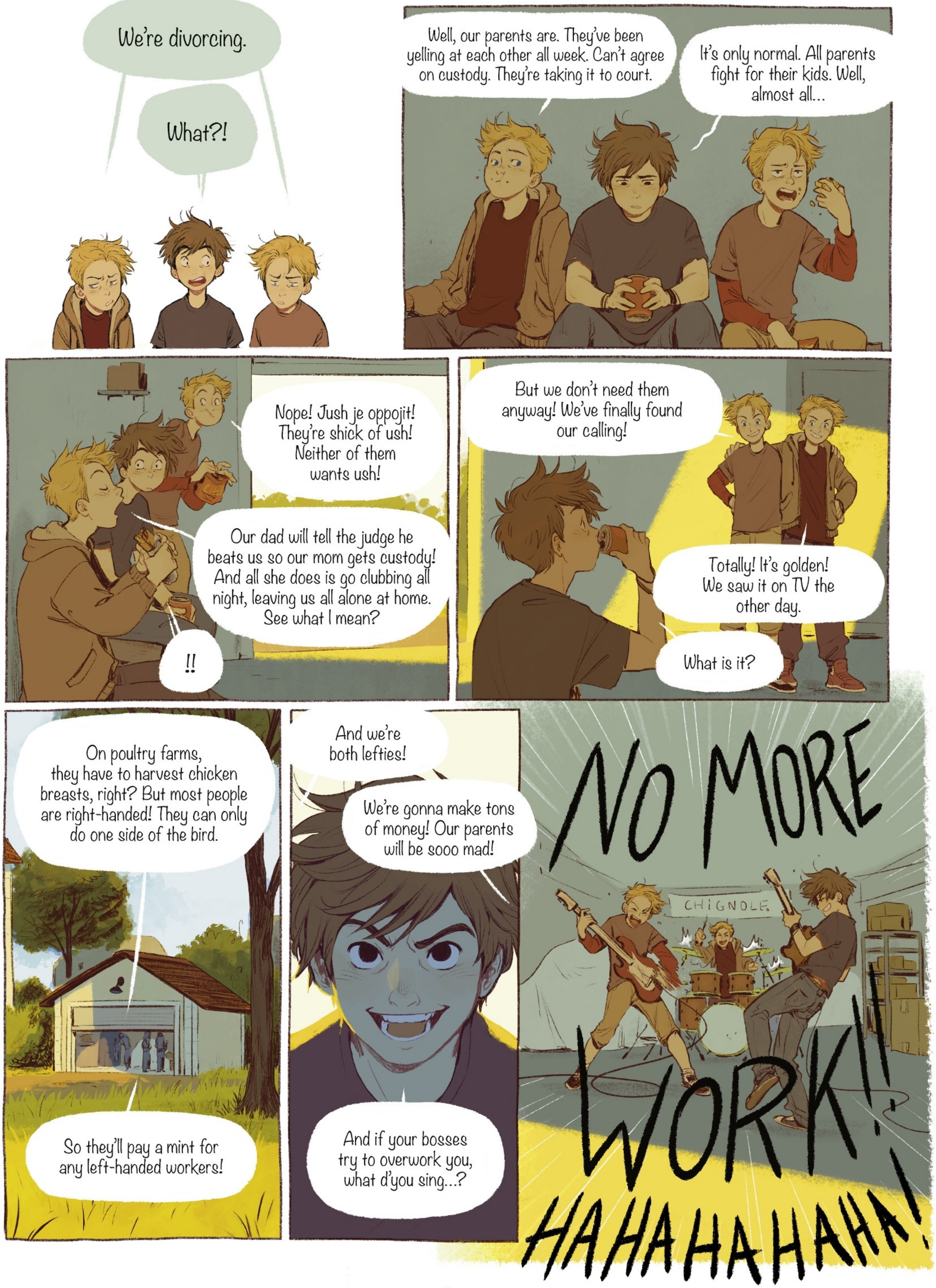
Based on the novel by Pascal Ruter

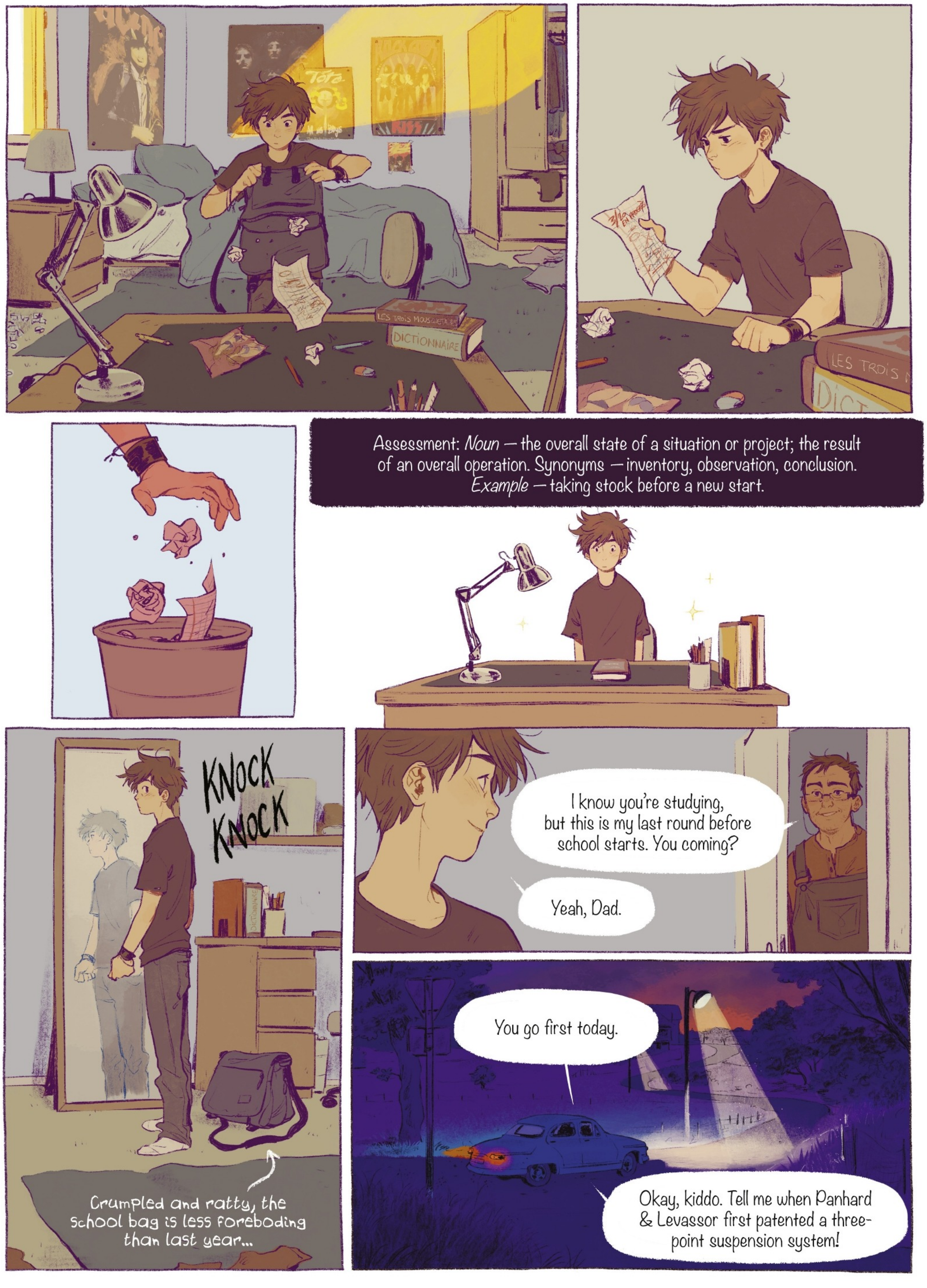

The moment was finally here. They called Marie and her page-turner to the stage. I thought I'd be shaking like a leaf, but instead I was filled with the most incredible calm, as if possessed by a sense of the peaceful passing of time.
Marie looked like she was elsewhere. Her eyes were wide open, as though she'd been hypnotized. The audience went quiet and the silence spread, engulfing the room. A moment of bated breath.
Hussein lifted his hand in the smallest of gestures, almost imperceptible but full of meaning, communicating without words.
Marie held her bow a couple of inches above the strings, hovering, waiting...
And in those few endless moments, all the memories came crashing back over me like a wave...
Marie on the ghost train. The candied apple. Marie on the ground, heartbroken. Marie's eyes. Marie's measured steps...
Then she brought her bow down across the strings and music poured out into the room...

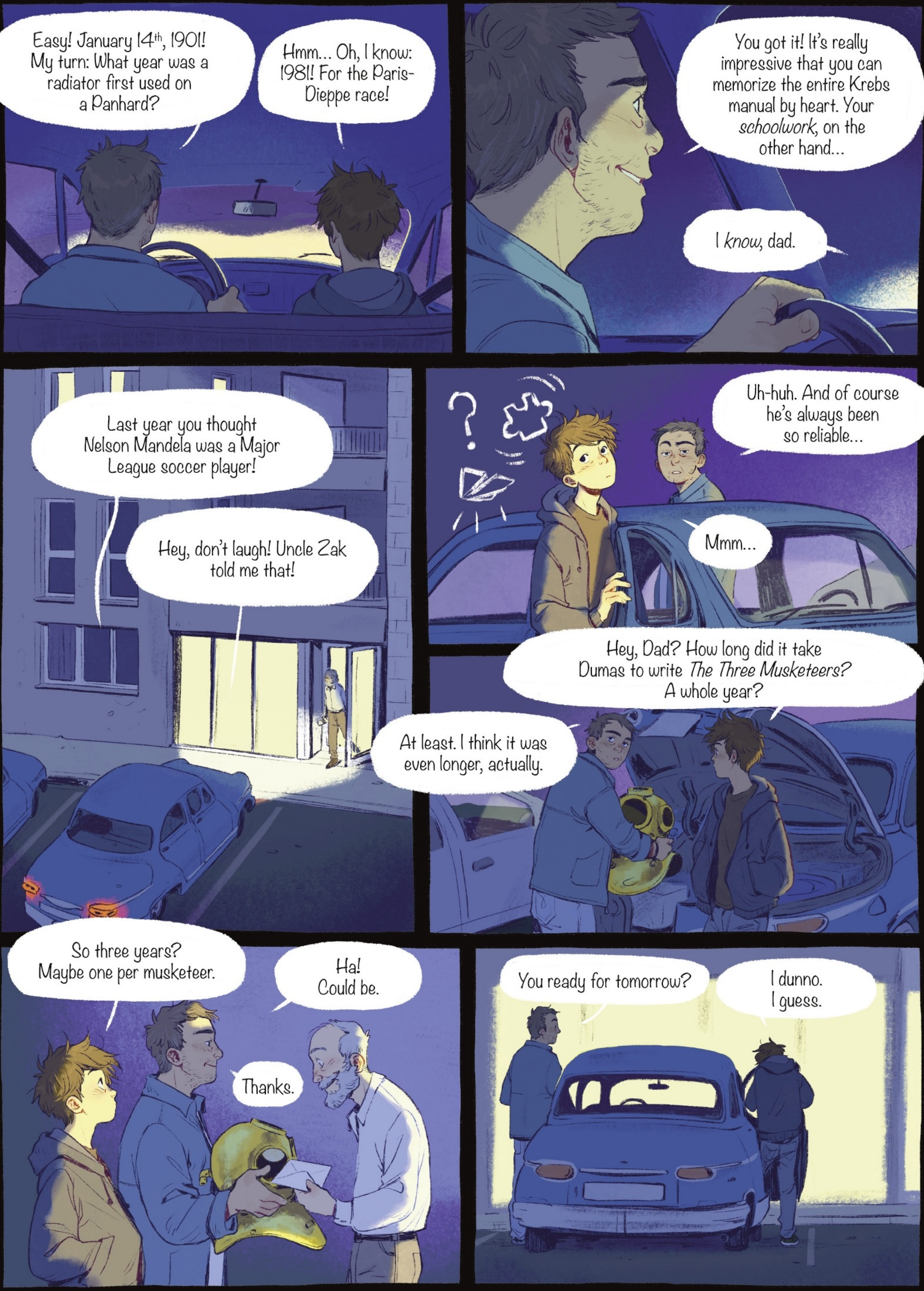

Ten months earlier...
NO MORE WORK!!
Nothing left to take! We need a break!
NO MORE WORK!!
Étienne on drums, Marcel on bass. fans of mega-decibels. I started calling them The Metro when I discovered there was an Étienne-Marcel station in Paris.*
LA CHIGNOLE
Busting ass no more! Watch us walk right out that door!
NO MORE WORK!!
Great lyrics, man! Those were some solid rhymes!
Show them to the music teacher when school starts up!
I dunno... Remember the first demo we tried to get him to listen to?

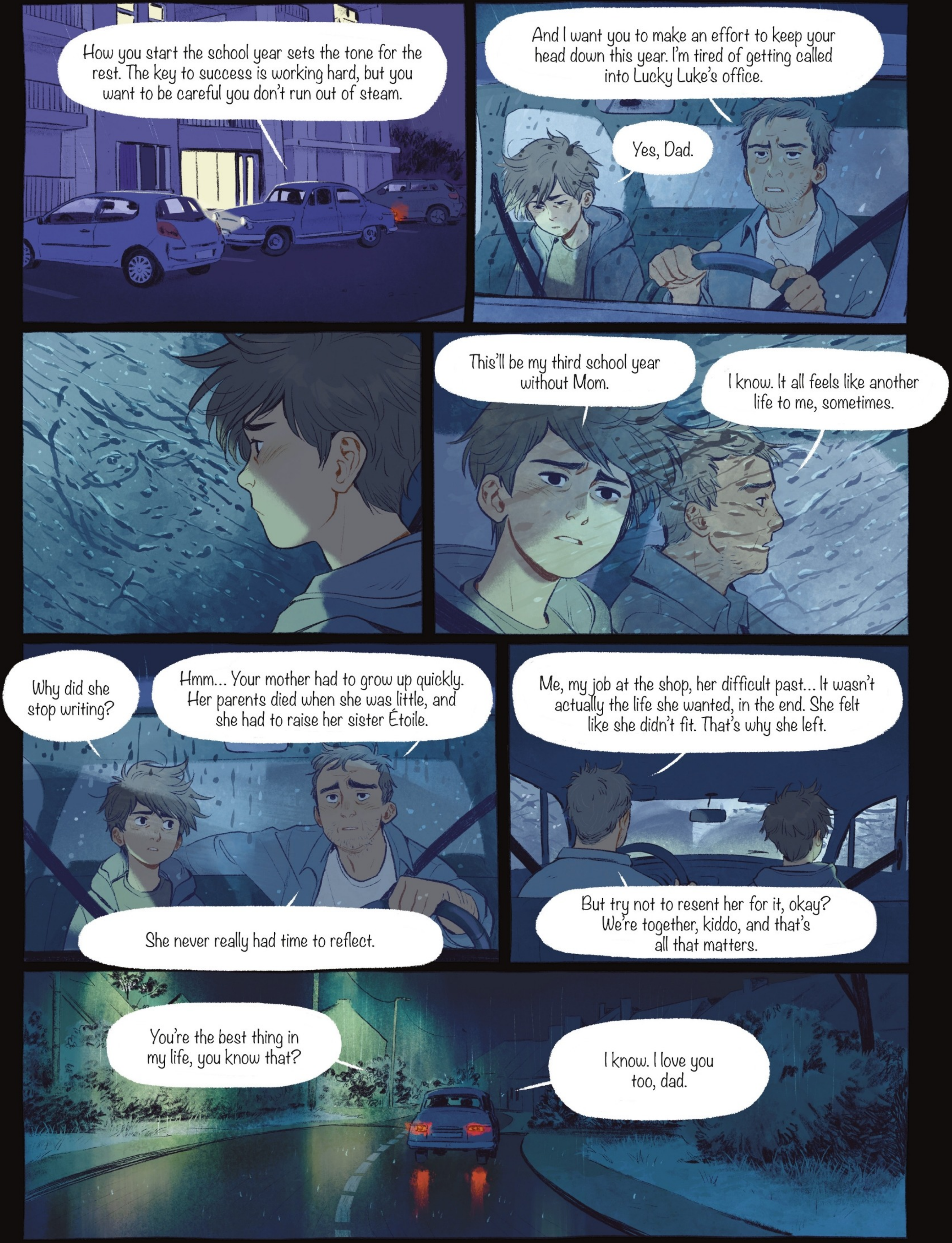
*But their official name was "La Chignole," which means a junker.

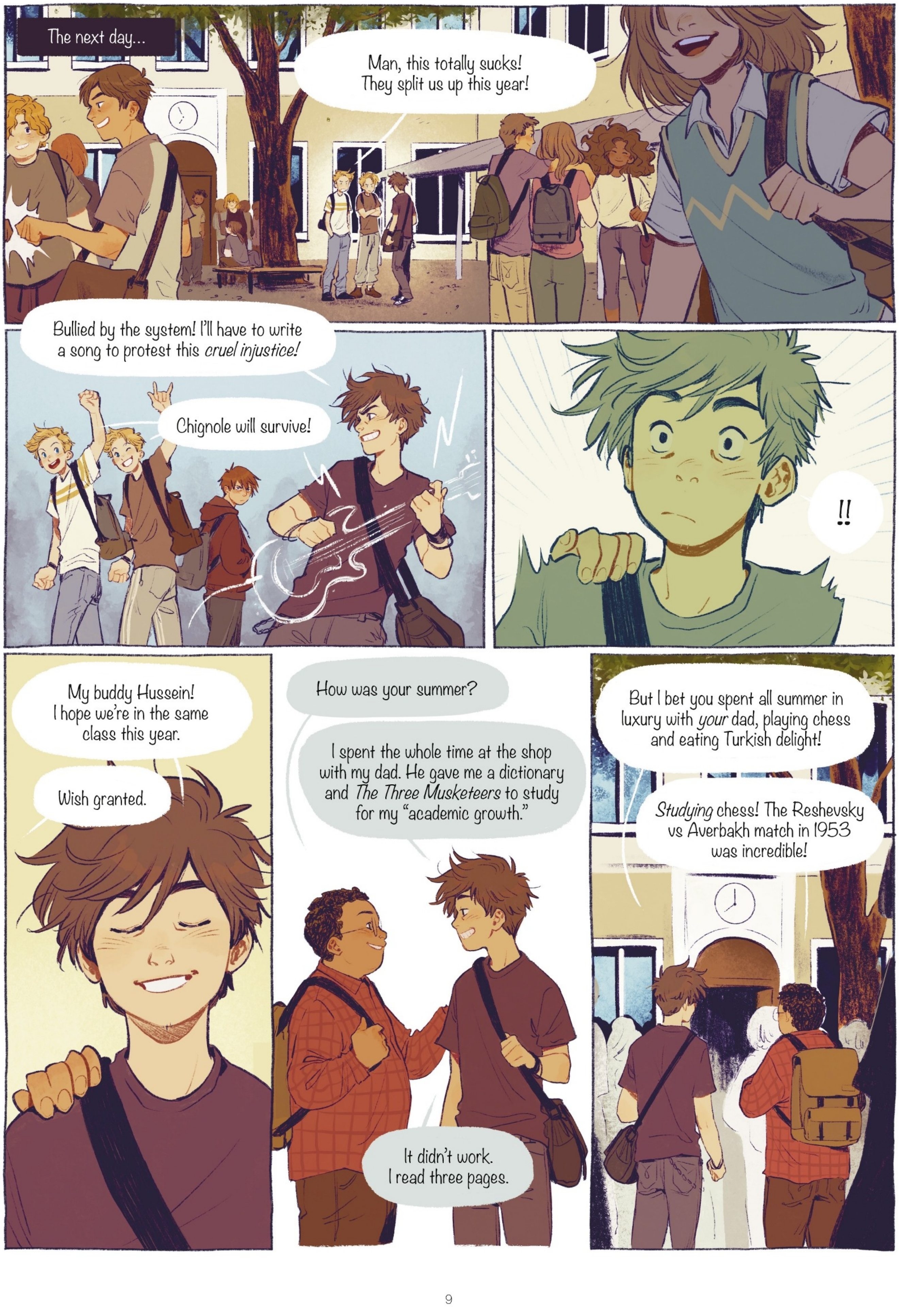

Must be a technical problem. The quality is horrible. It sounds like you recorded it on a runway!
What does that dude know about rock? All he does is play the flute all day!
We need to perform on stage! Let's ask Lucky Guidance Counselor Luke about the school dance.
Means we'd better practice, then! Ready to go again?
Weren't you guys supposed to go home and pack?
It's just that... the vibe kinda sucks at home right now.

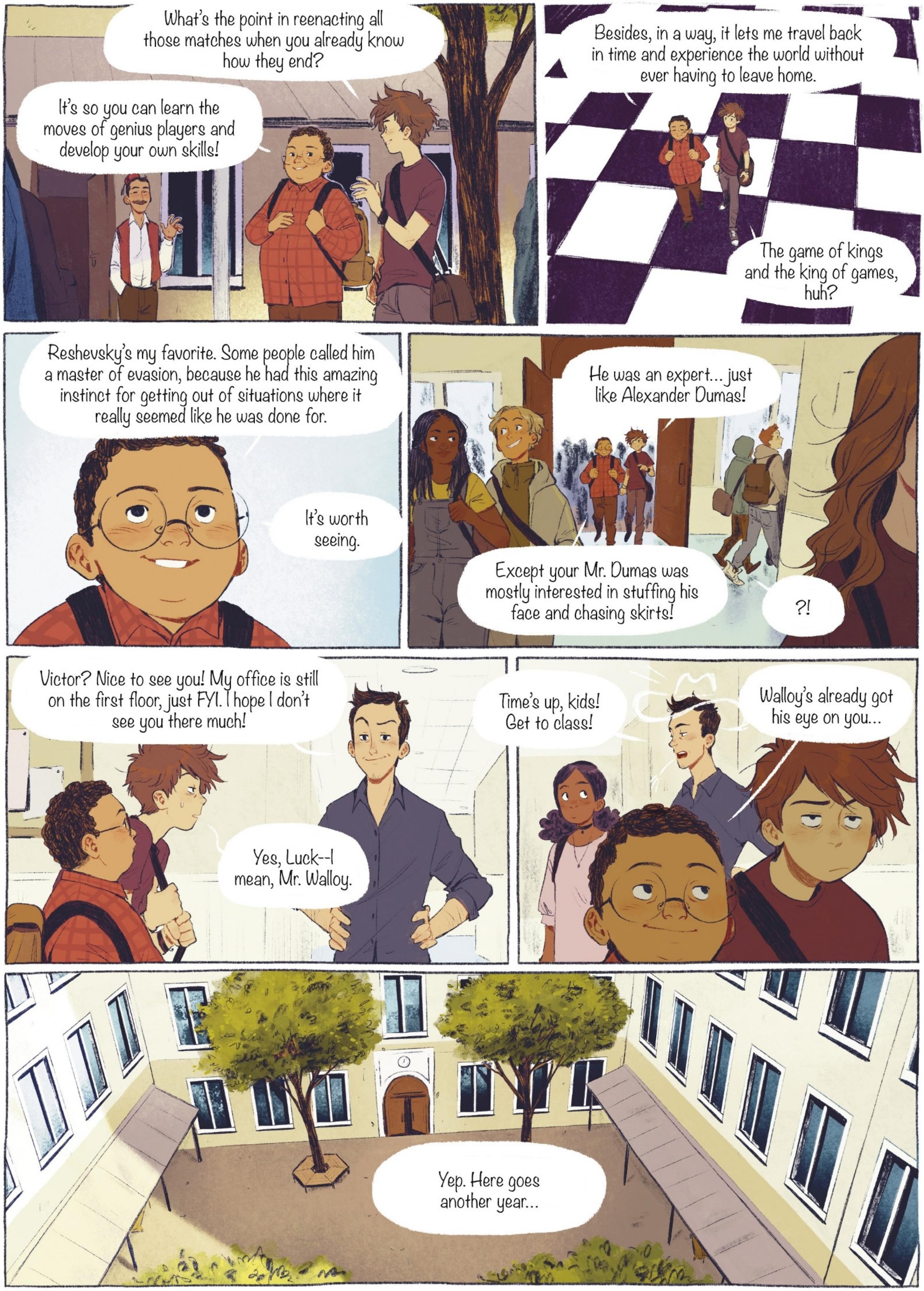

We're divorcing.
What?!
Well, our parents are. They've been yelling at each other all week. Can't agree on custody. They're taking it to court.
It's only normal. All parents fight for their kids. Well, almost all...
Nope! Jush je oppojit! They're shick of ush! Neither of them wants ush!
Our dad will tell the judge he beats us so our mom gets custody! And all she does is go clubbing all night, leaving us all alone at home. See what I mean?
!!
But we don't need them anyway! We've finally found our calling!
Totally! It's golden! We saw it on TV the other day.
What is it?
On poultry farms, they have to harvest chicken breasts, right? But most people are right-handed! They can only do one side of the bird.
So they'll pay a mint for any left-handed workers!
And we're both lefties!
We're gonna make tons of money! Our parents will be sooo mad!
And if your bosses try to overwork you, what d'you sing...?
NO MORE WORK!!
HAHAHAHAHAHA!
CHIGNOLE

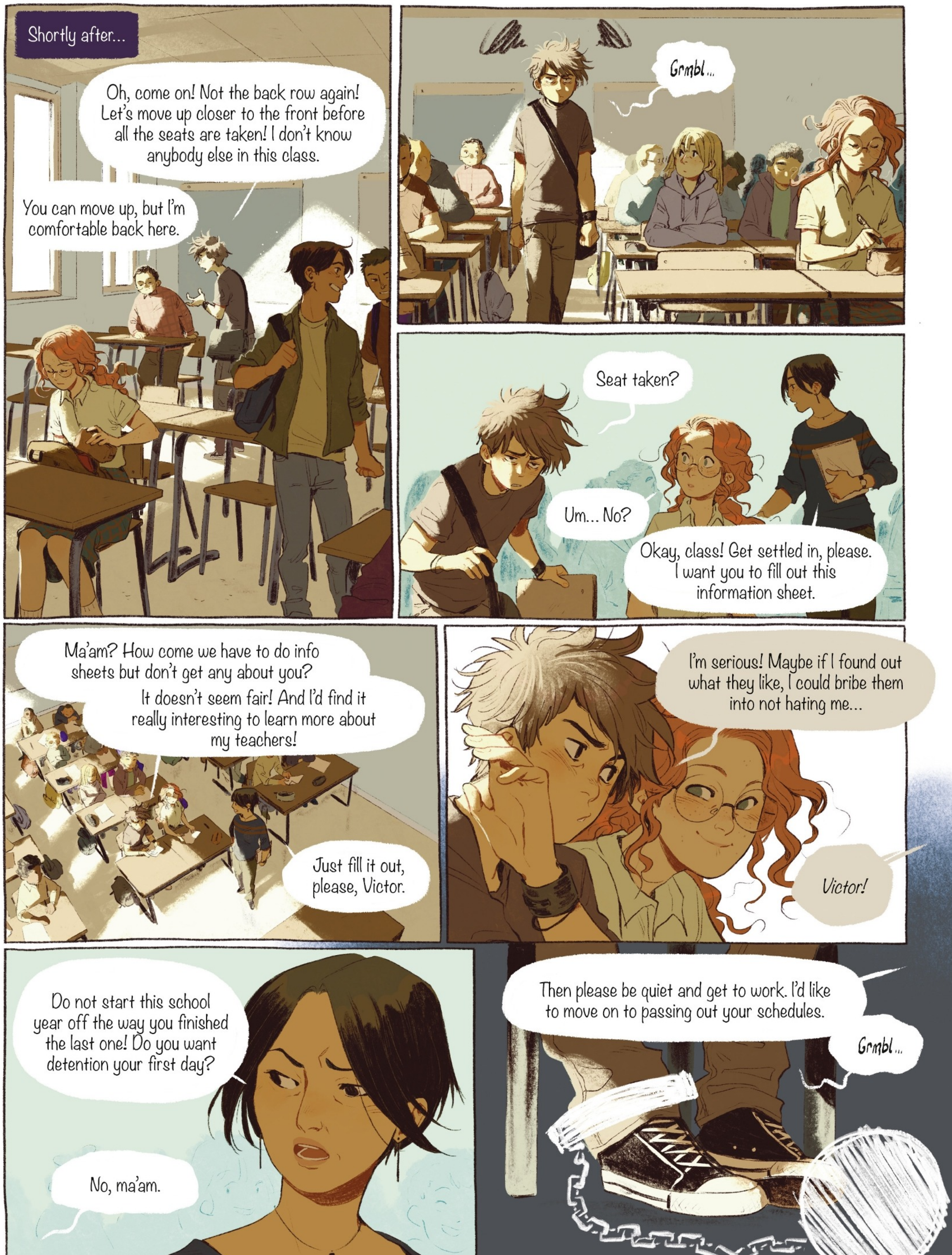

LES TROIS MOUSQUETAIRES
DICTIONNAIRE
LES TROIS
DICT
Assessment: *Noun* — the overall state of a situation or project; the result of an overall operation. Synonyms — inventory, observation, conclusion. *Example* — taking stock before a new start.
KNOCK KNOCK
DICTIONNAIRE
Crumpled and ratty, the school bag is less foreboding than last year...
I know you're studying, but this is my last round before school starts. You coming?
Yeah, Dad.
You go first today.
Okay, kiddo. Tell me when Panhard & Levassor first patented a three-point suspension system!

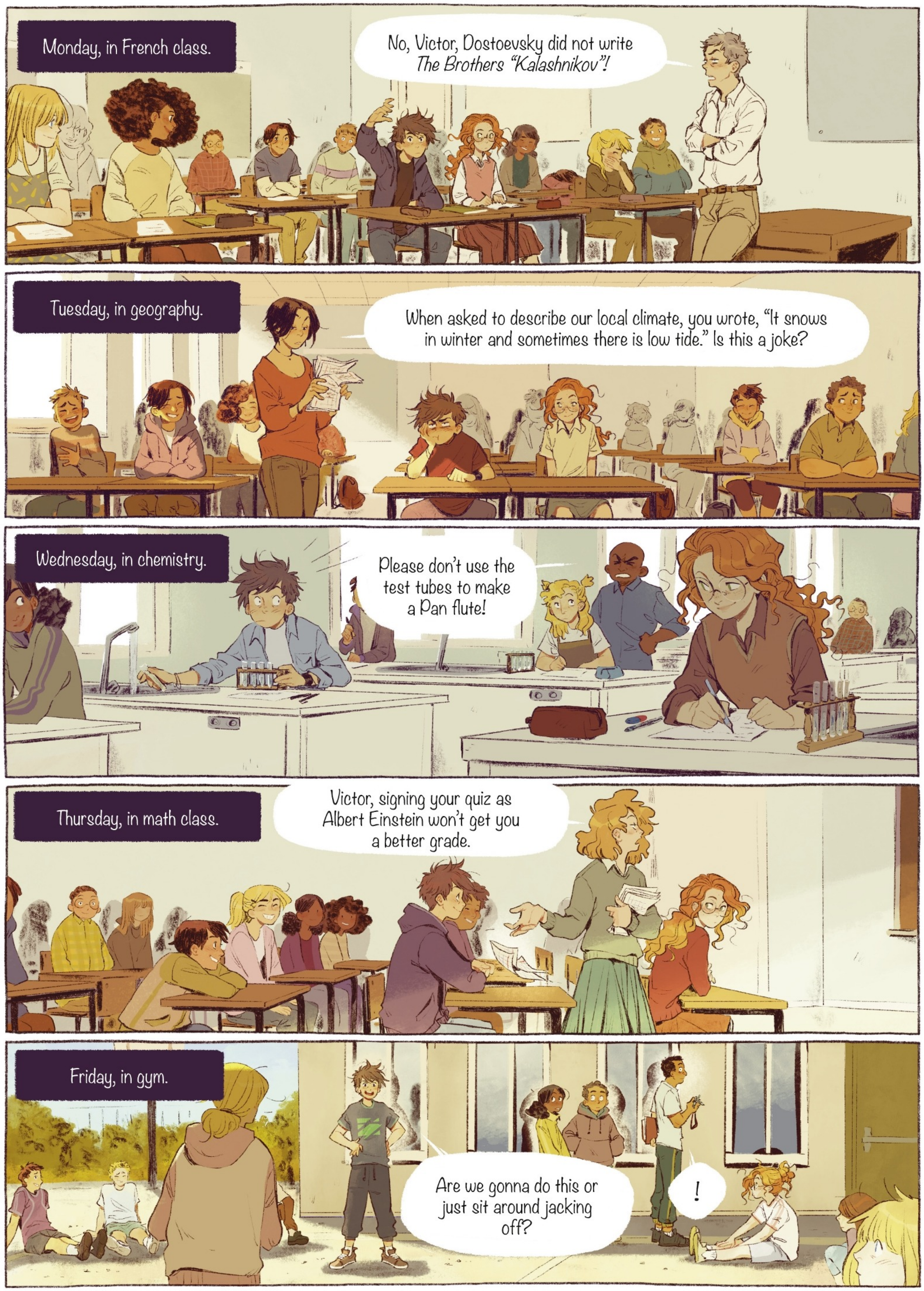

Easy! January 14th, 1901! My turn: What year was a radiator first used on a Panhard?
Hmm... Oh, I know: 1981! For the Paris-Dieppe race!
You got it! It's really impressive that you can memorize the entire Krebs manual by heart. Your *schoolwork*, on the other hand...
I *know*, dad.
Last year you thought Nelson Mandela was a Major League soccer player!
Hey, don't laugh! Uncle Zak told me that!
Uh-huh. And of course he's always been so reliable...
Mmm...
Hey, Dad? How long did it take Dumas to write *The Three Musketeers?* A whole year?
At least. I think it was even longer, actually.
So three years? Maybe one per musketeer.
Ha! Could be.
Thanks.
You ready for tomorrow?
I dunno. I guess.

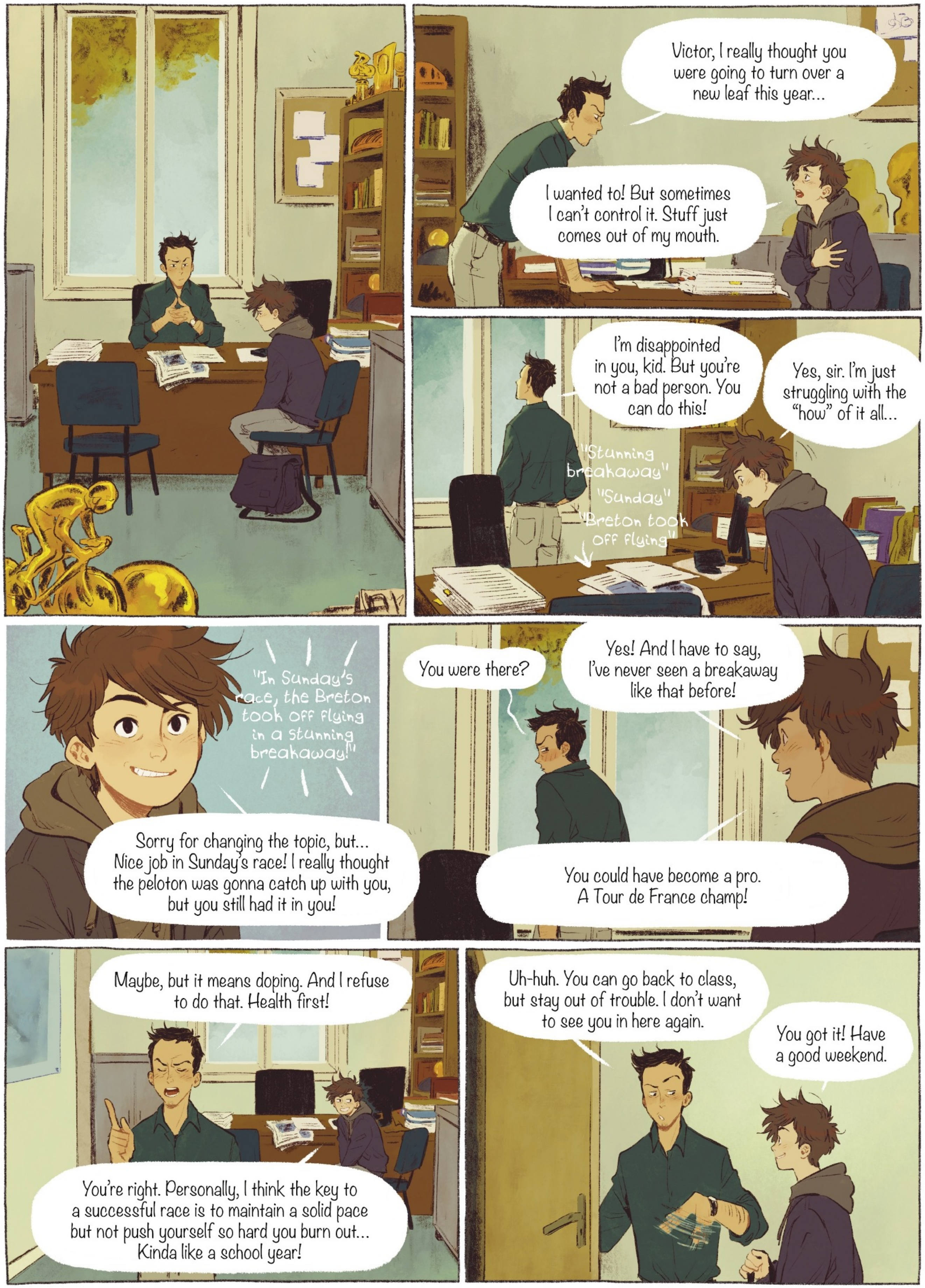

How you start the school year sets the tone for the rest. The key to success is working hard, but you want to be careful you don't run out of steam.
And I want you to make an effort to keep your head down this year. I'm tired of getting called into Lucky Luke's office.
Yes, Dad.
This'll be my third school year without Mom.
I know. It all feels like another life to me, sometimes.
Why did she stop writing?
Hmm... Your mother had to grow up quickly. Her parents died when she was little, and she had to raise her sister Étoile.
She never really had time to reflect.
Me, my job at the shop, her difficult past... It wasn't actually the life she wanted, in the end. She felt like she didn't fit. That's why she left.
But try not to resent her for it, okay? We're together, kiddo, and that's all that matters.
You're the best thing in my life, you know that?
I know. I love you too, dad.

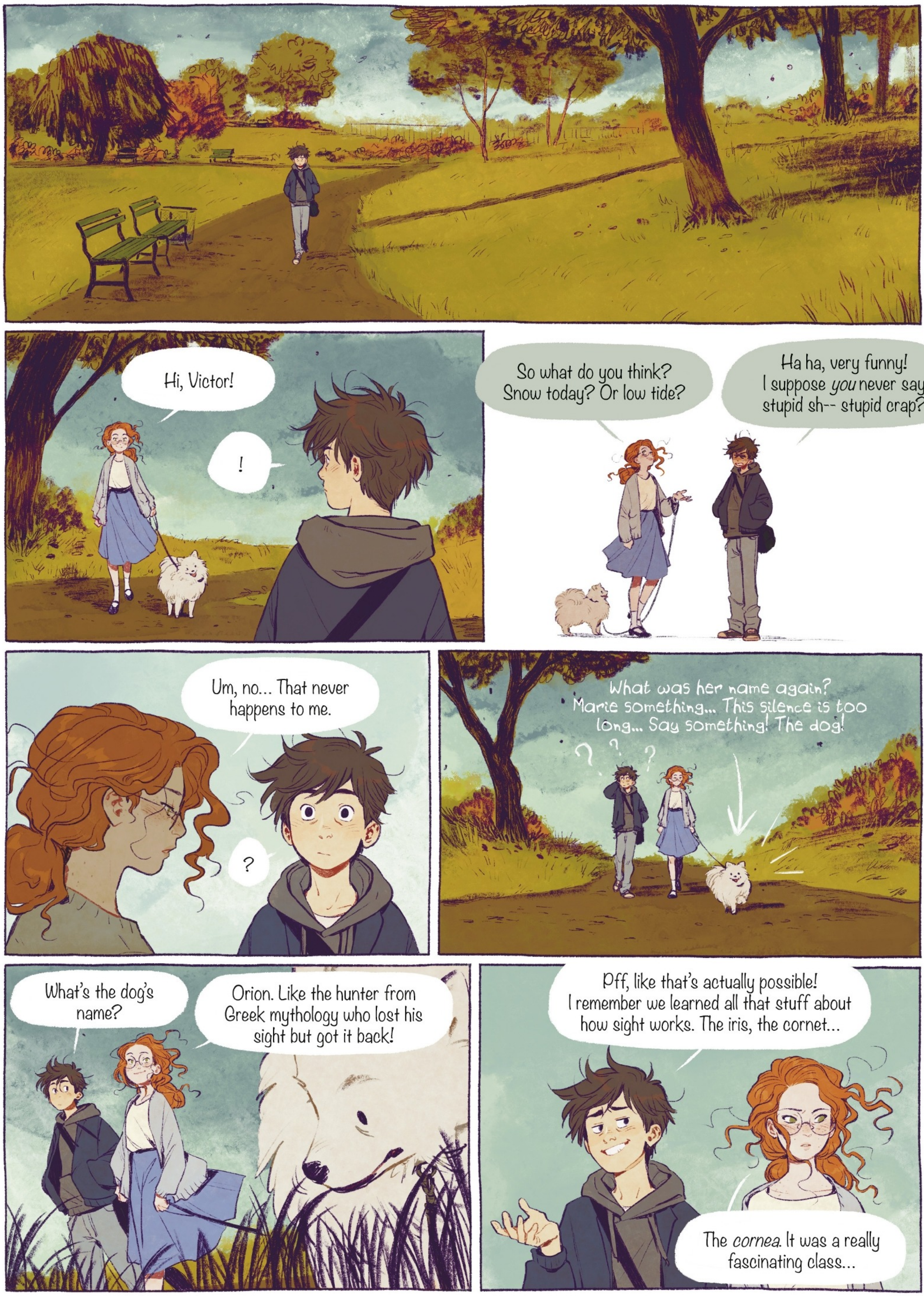

The next day...
Man, this totally sucks! They split us up this year!
Bullied by the system! I'll have to write a song to protest this *cruel injustice!*
Chignole will survive!
!!
My buddy Hussein! I hope we're in the same class this year.
Wish granted.
How was your summer?
I spent the whole time at the shop with my dad. He gave me a dictionary and *The Three Musketeers* to study for my "academic growth."
It didn't work. I read three pages.
But I bet you spent all summer in luxury with *your* dad, playing chess and eating Turkish delight!
Studying chess! The Reshevsky vs Averbakh match in 1953 was incredible!

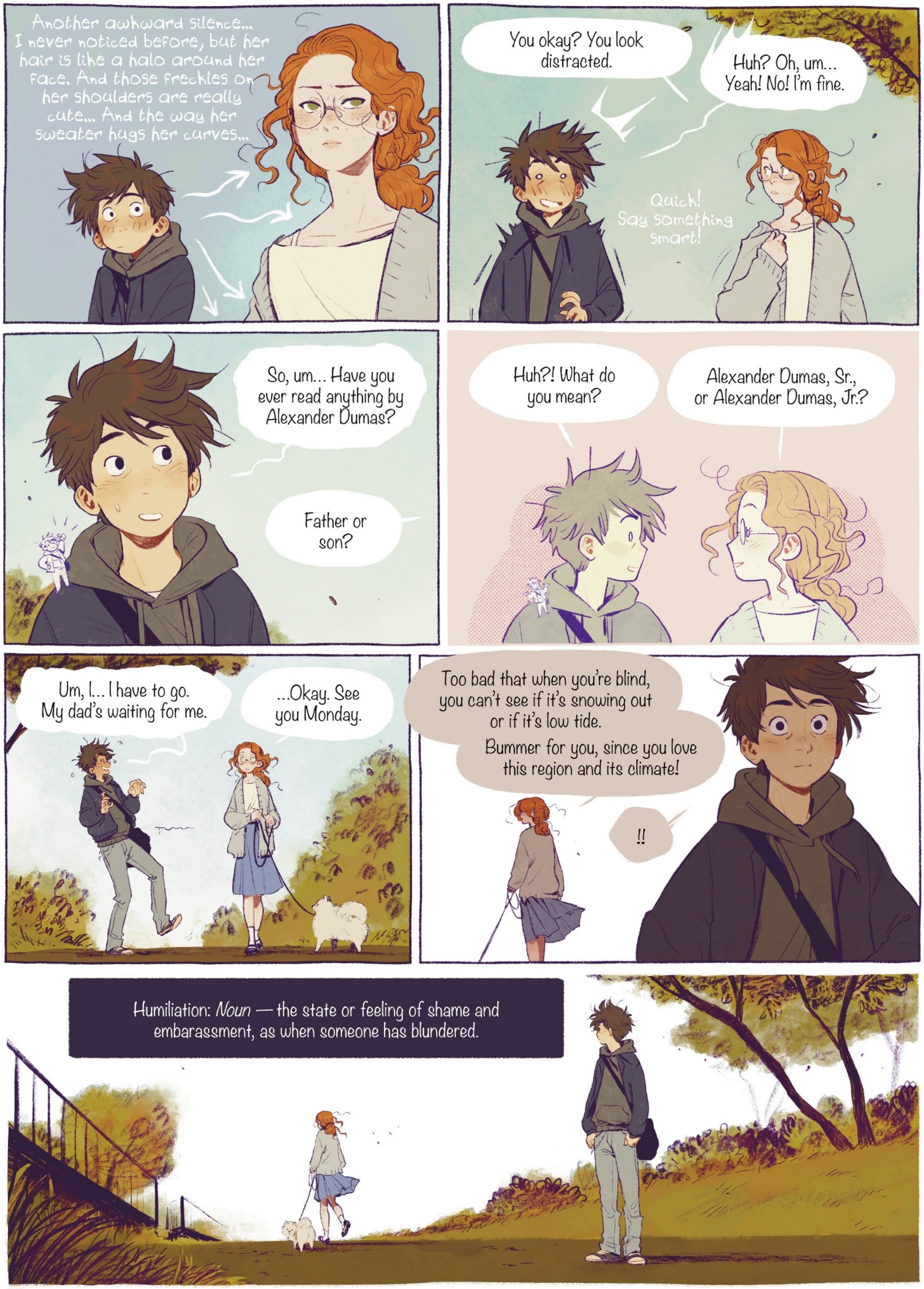

What's the point in reenacting all those matches when you already know how they end?
It's so you can learn the moves of genius players and develop your own skills!
Besides, in a way, it lets me travel back in time and experience the world without ever having to leave home.
The game of kings and the king of games, huh?
Reshevsky's my favorite. Some people called him a master of evasion, because he had this amazing instinct for getting out of situations where it really seemed like he was done for.
It's worth seeing.
He was an expert... just like Alexander Dumas!
Except your Mr. Dumas was mostly interested in stuffing his face and chasing skirts!
?!
Victor? Nice to see you! My office is still on the first floor, just FYI. I hope I don't see you there much!
Yes, Luck--I mean, Mr. Walloy.
Time's up, kids! Get to class!
Walloy's already got his eye on you...
Yep. Here goes another year...

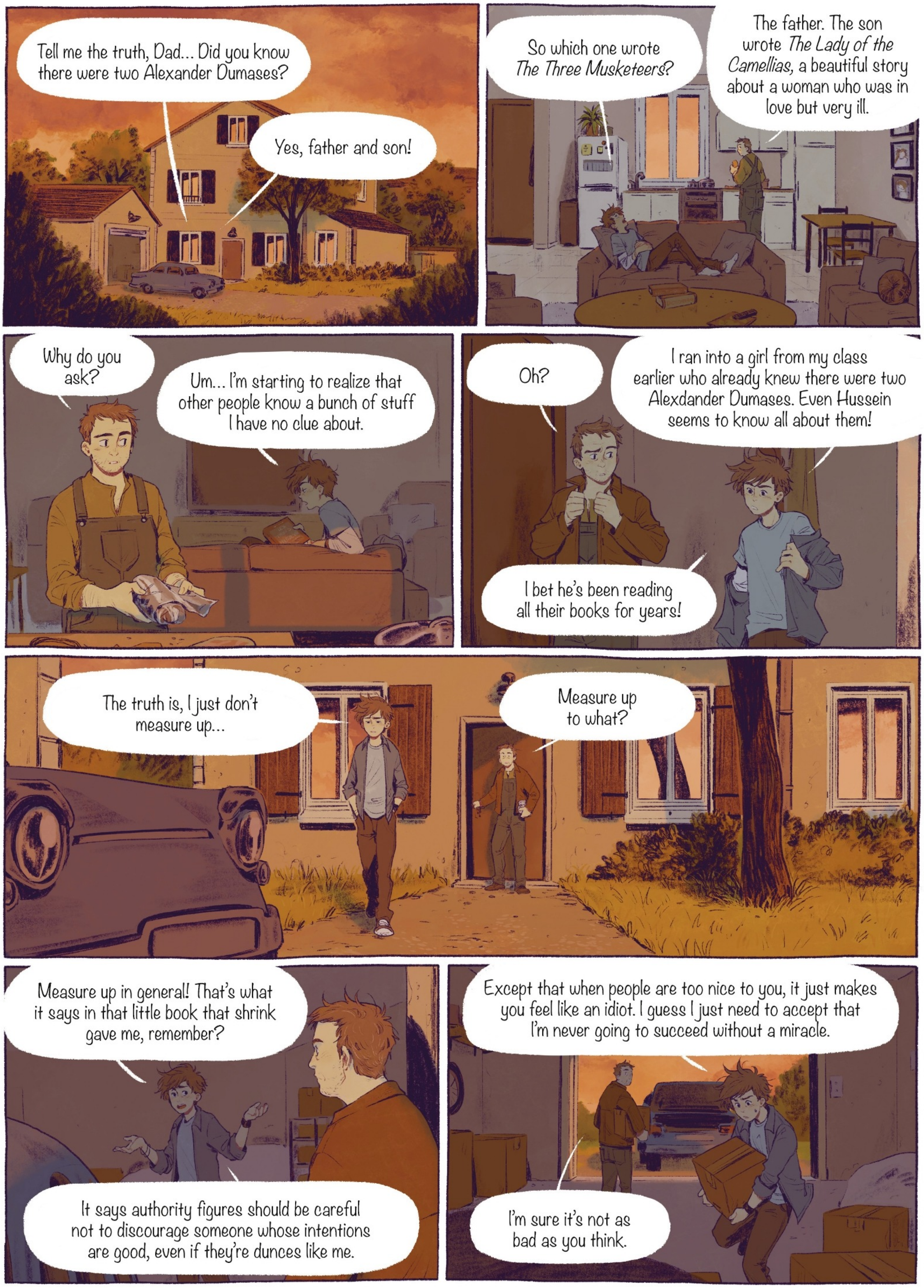

Shortly after...
Oh, come on! Not the back row again! Let's move up closer to the front before all the seats are taken! I don't know anybody else in this class.
You can move up, but I'm comfortable back here.
Grmbl...
Seat taken?
Um... No?
Okay, class! Get settled in, please. I want you to fill out this information sheet.
Ma'am? How come we have to do info sheets but don't get any about you?
It doesn't seem fair! And I'd find it really interesting to learn more about my teachers!
Just fill it out, please, Victor.
I'm serious! Maybe if I found out what they like, I could bribe them into not hating me...
Victor!
Do not start this school year off the way you finished the last one! Do you want detention your first day?
No, ma'am.
Then please be quiet and get to work. I'd like to move on to passing out your schedules.
Grmbl...

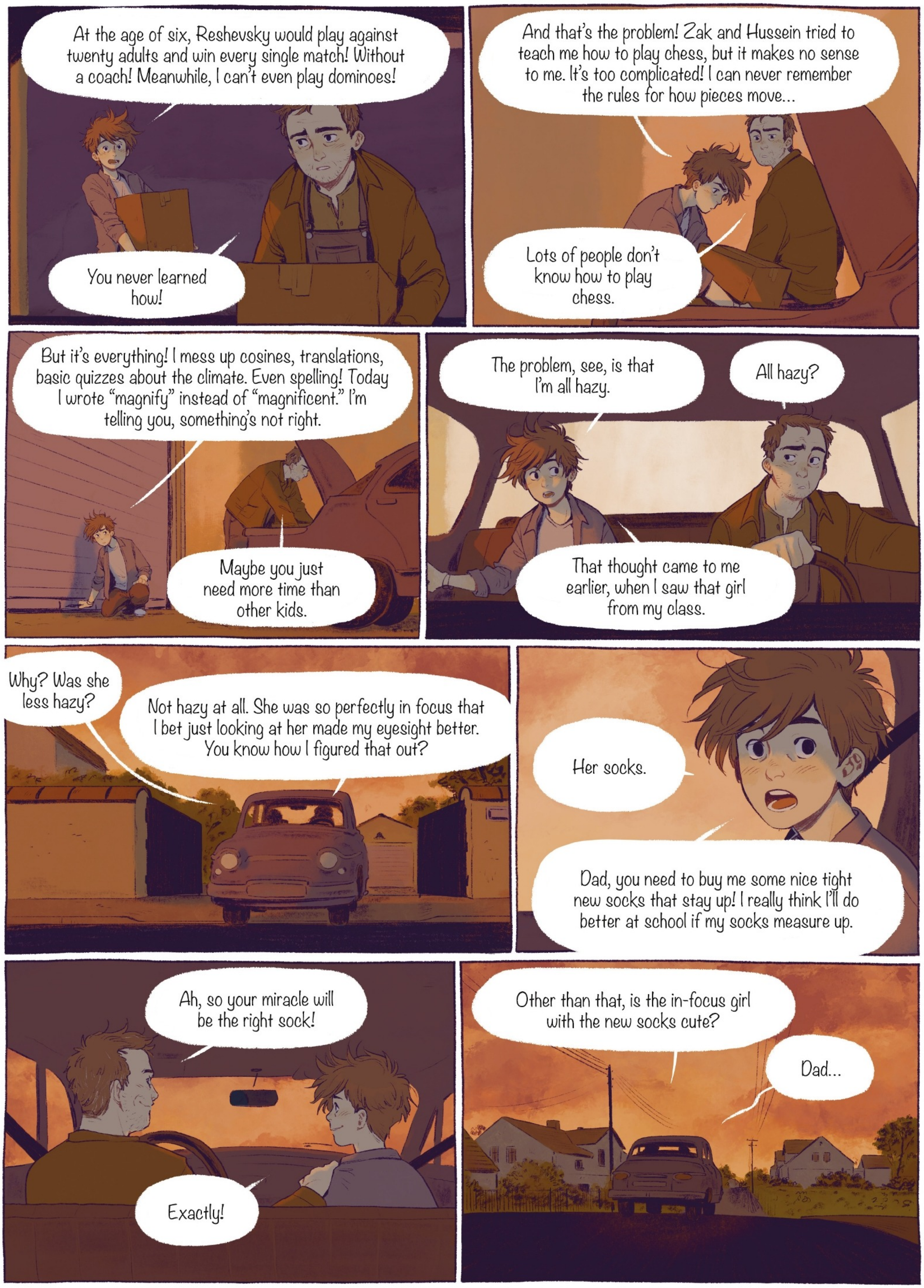

Monday, in French class.
No, Victor, Dostoevsky did not write *The Brothers "Kalashnikov"*!
Tuesday, in geography.
When asked to describe our local climate, you wrote, "It snows in winter and sometimes there is low tide." Is this a joke?
Wednesday, in chemistry.
Please don't use the test tubes to make a Pan flute!
Thursday, in math class.
Victor, signing your quiz as Albert Einstein won't get you a better grade.
Friday, in gym.
Are we gonna do this or just sit around jacking off?
!

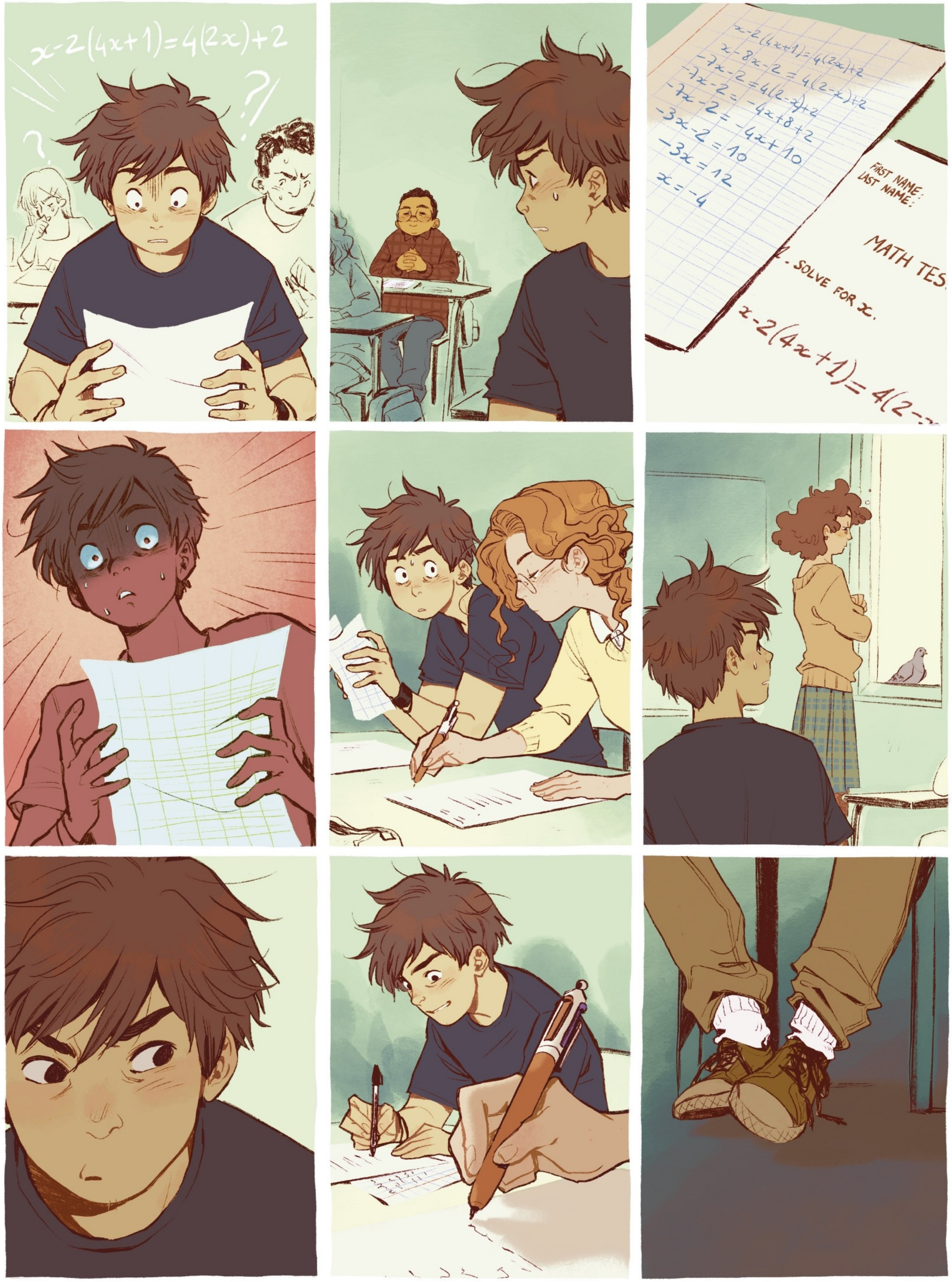

Victor, I really thought you were going to turn over a new leaf this year...
I wanted to! But sometimes I can't control it. Stuff just comes out of my mouth.
I'm disappointed in you, kid. But you're not a bad person. You can do this!
Yes, sir. I'm just struggling with the "how" of it all...
"Stunning breakaway"
"Sunday"
"Breton took off flying"
"In Sunday's race, the Breton took off flying in a stunning breakaway!"
Sorry for changing the topic, but... Nice job in Sunday's race! I really thought the peloton was gonna catch up with you, but you still had it in you!
You were there?
Yes! And I have to say, I've never seen a breakaway like that before!
You could have become a pro. A Tour de France champ!
Maybe, but it means doping. And I refuse to do that. Health first!
You're right. Personally, I think the key to a successful race is to maintain a solid pace but not push yourself so hard you burn out... Kinda like a school year!
Uh-huh. You can go back to class, but stay out of trouble. I don't want to see you in here again.
You got it! Have a good weekend.

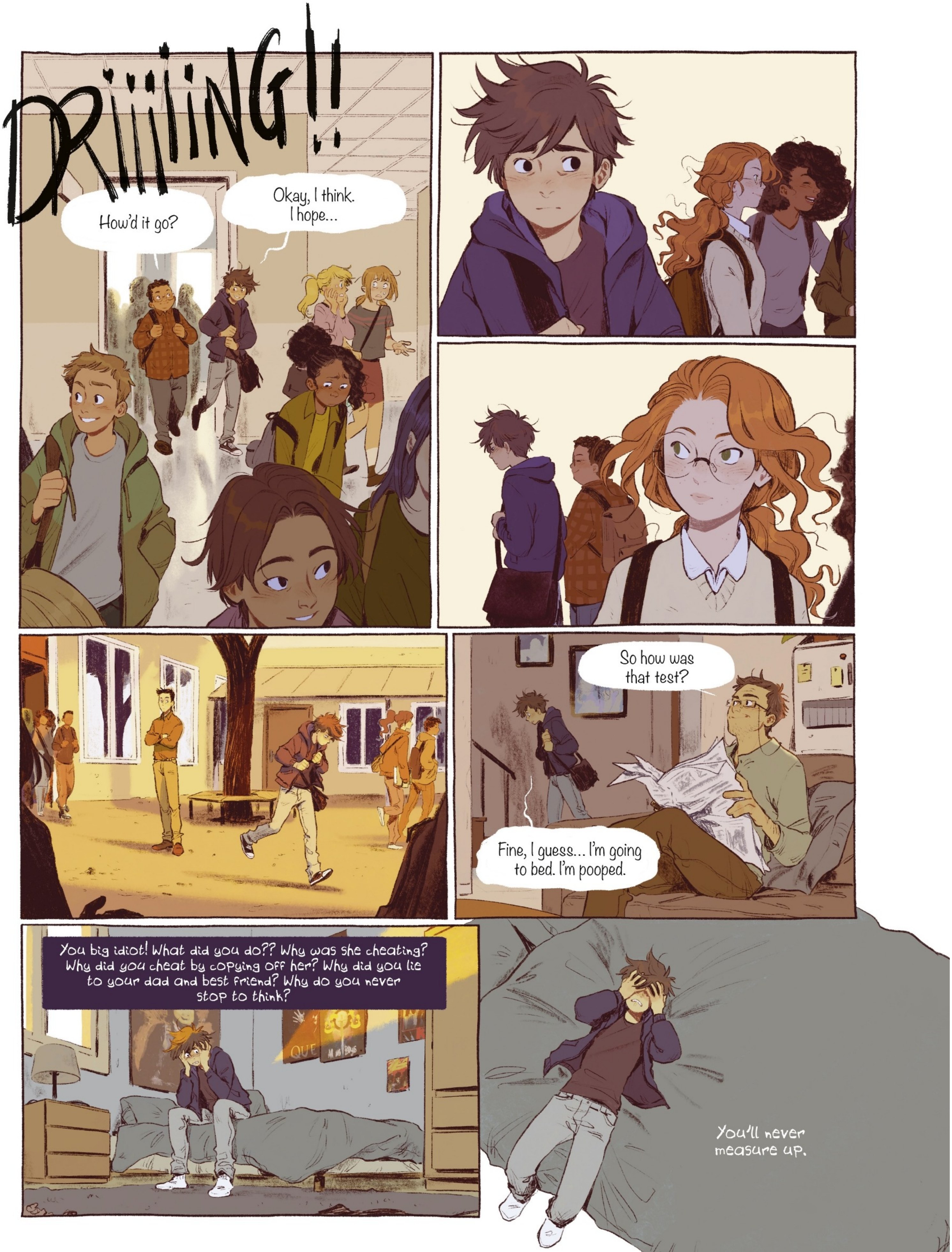

Hi, Victor!
!
So what do you think? Snow today? Or low tide?
Ha ha, very funny! I suppose *you* never say stupid sh-- stupid crap?
Um, no... That never happens to me.
?
What was her name again? Marie something... This silence is too long... Say something! The dog!
? ? ?
What's the dog's name?
Orion. Like the hunter from Greek mythology who lost his sight but got it back!
Pff, like that's actually possible! I remember we learned all that stuff about how sight works. The iris, the cornet...
The *cornea*. It was a really fascinating class...

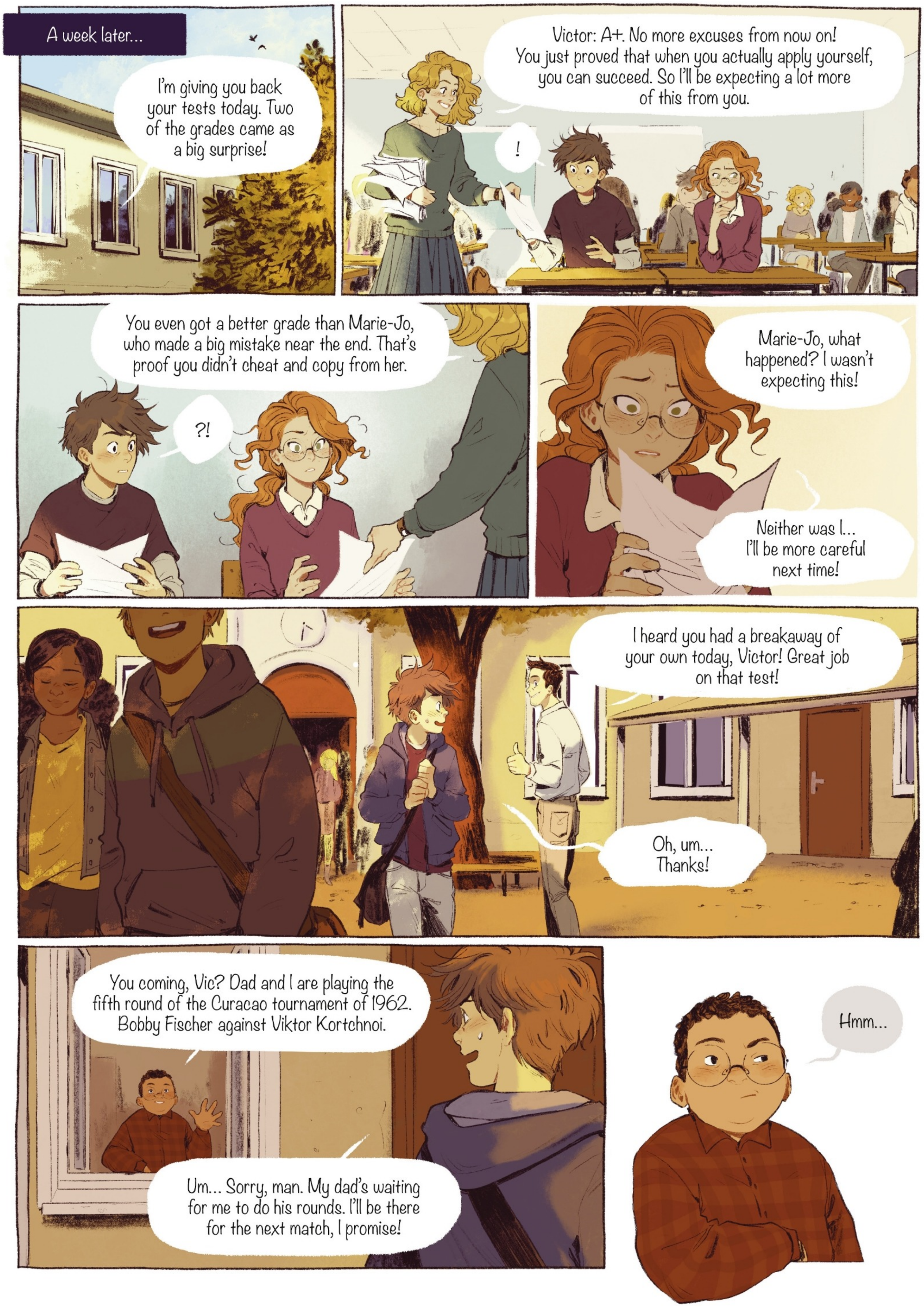

Another awkward silence... I never noticed before, but her hair is like a halo around her face. And those freckles on her shoulders are really cute... And the way her sweater hugs her curves...
You okay? You look distracted.
Huh? Oh, um... Yeah! No! I'm fine.
Quick! Say something smart!
So, um... Have you ever read anything by Alexander Dumas?
Father or son?
Huh?! What do you mean?
Alexander Dumas, Sr., or Alexander Dumas, Jr.?
Um, I... I have to go. My dad's waiting for me.
...Okay. See you Monday.
Too bad that when you're blind, you can't see if it's snowing out or if it's low tide.
Bummer for you, since you love this region and its climate!
!!
Humiliation: *Noun* — the state or feeling of shame and embarassment, as when someone has blundered.

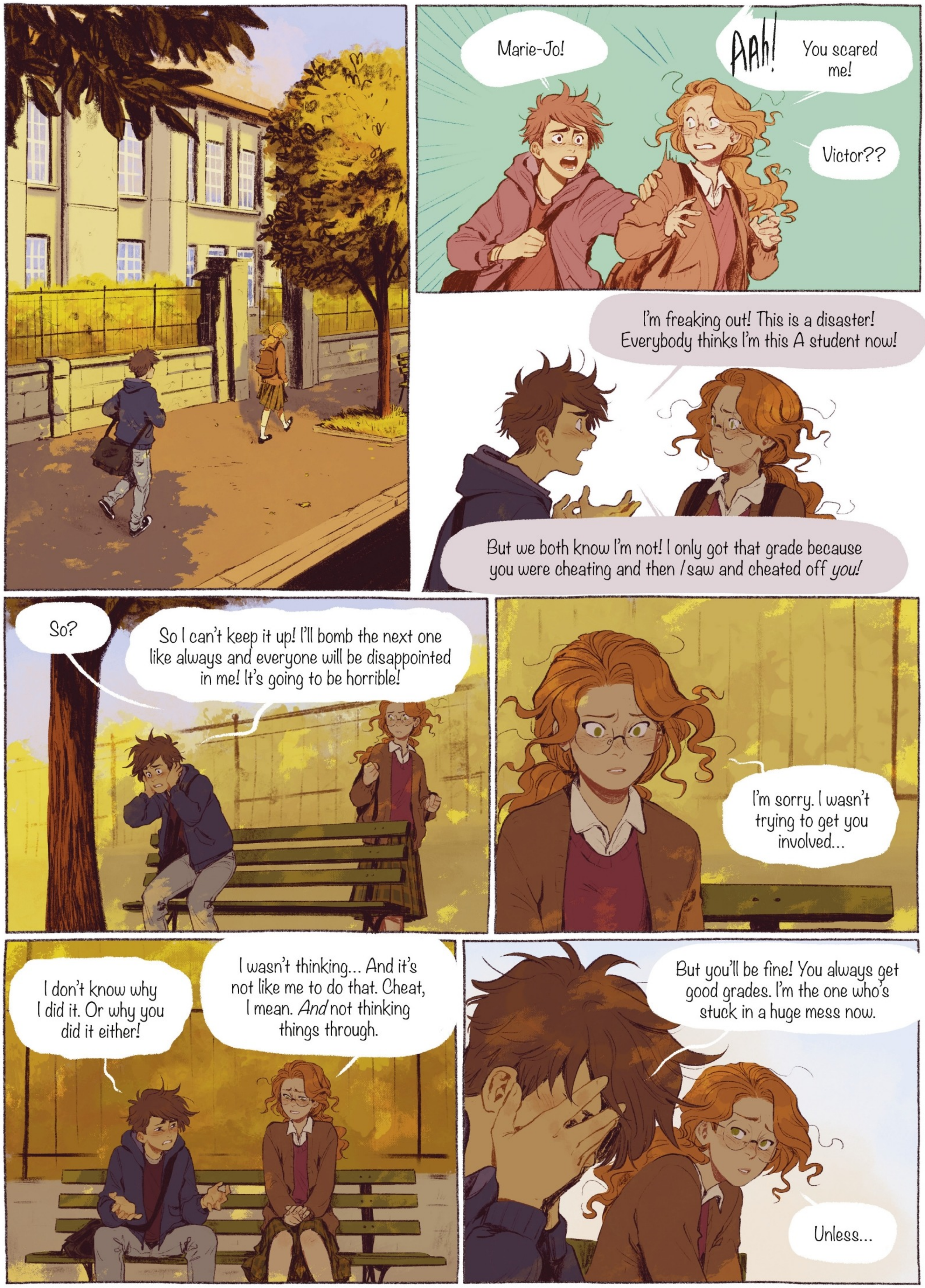

Tell me the truth, Dad... Did you know there were two Alexander Dumases?
Yes, father and son!
So which one wrote *The Three Musketeers*?
The father. The son wrote *The Lady of the Camellias*, a beautiful story about a woman who was in love but very ill.
Why do you ask?
Um... I'm starting to realize that other people know a bunch of stuff I have no clue about.
Oh?
I ran into a girl from my class earlier who already knew there were two Alexdander Dumases. Even Hussein seems to know all about them!
I bet he's been reading all their books for years!
The truth is, I just don't measure up...
Measure up to what?
Measure up in general! That's what it says in that little book that shrink gave me, remember?
It says authority figures should be careful not to discourage someone whose intentions are good, even if they're dunces like me.
Except that when people are too nice to you, it just makes you feel like an idiot. I guess I just need to accept that I'm never going to succeed without a miracle.
I'm sure it's not as bad as you think.

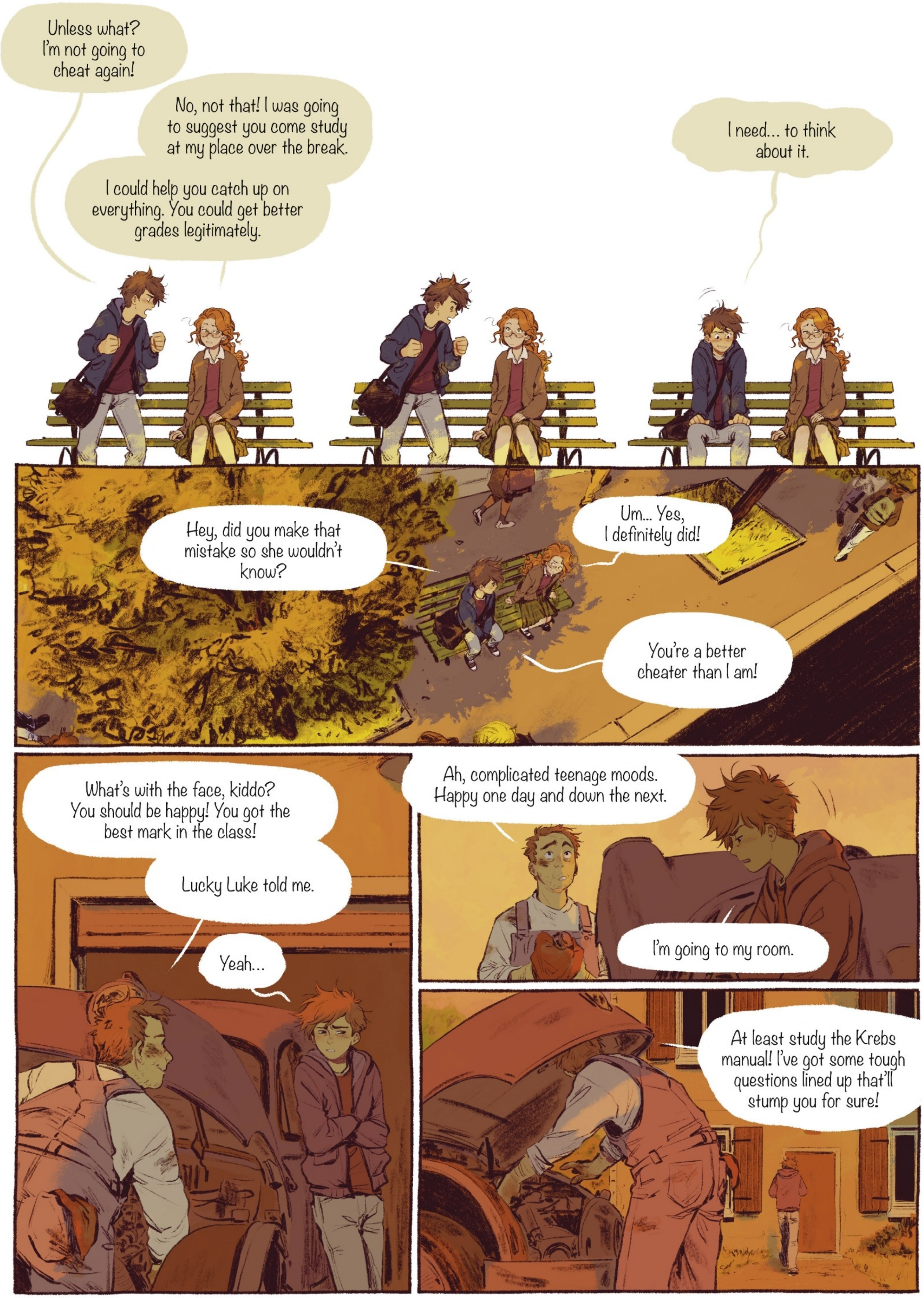

At the age of six, Reshevsky would play against twenty adults and win every single match! Without a coach! Meanwhile, I can't even play dominoes!
You never learned how!
And that's the problem! Zak and Hussein tried to teach me how to play chess, but it makes no sense to me. It's too complicated! I can never remember the rules for how pieces move...
Lots of people don't know how to play chess.
But it's everything! I mess up cosines, translations, basic quizzes about the climate. Even spelling! Today I wrote "magnify" instead of "magnificent." I'm telling you, something's not right.
Maybe you just need more time than other kids.
The problem, see, is that I'm all hazy.
All hazy?
That thought came to me earlier, when I saw that girl from my class.
Why? Was she less hazy?
Not hazy at all. She was so perfectly in focus that I bet just looking at her made my eyesight better. You know how I figured that out?
Her socks.
Dad, you need to buy me some nice tight new socks that stay up! I really think I'll do better at school if my socks measure up.
Ah, so your miracle will be the right sock!
Exactly!
Other than that, is the in-focus girl with the new socks cute?
Dad...

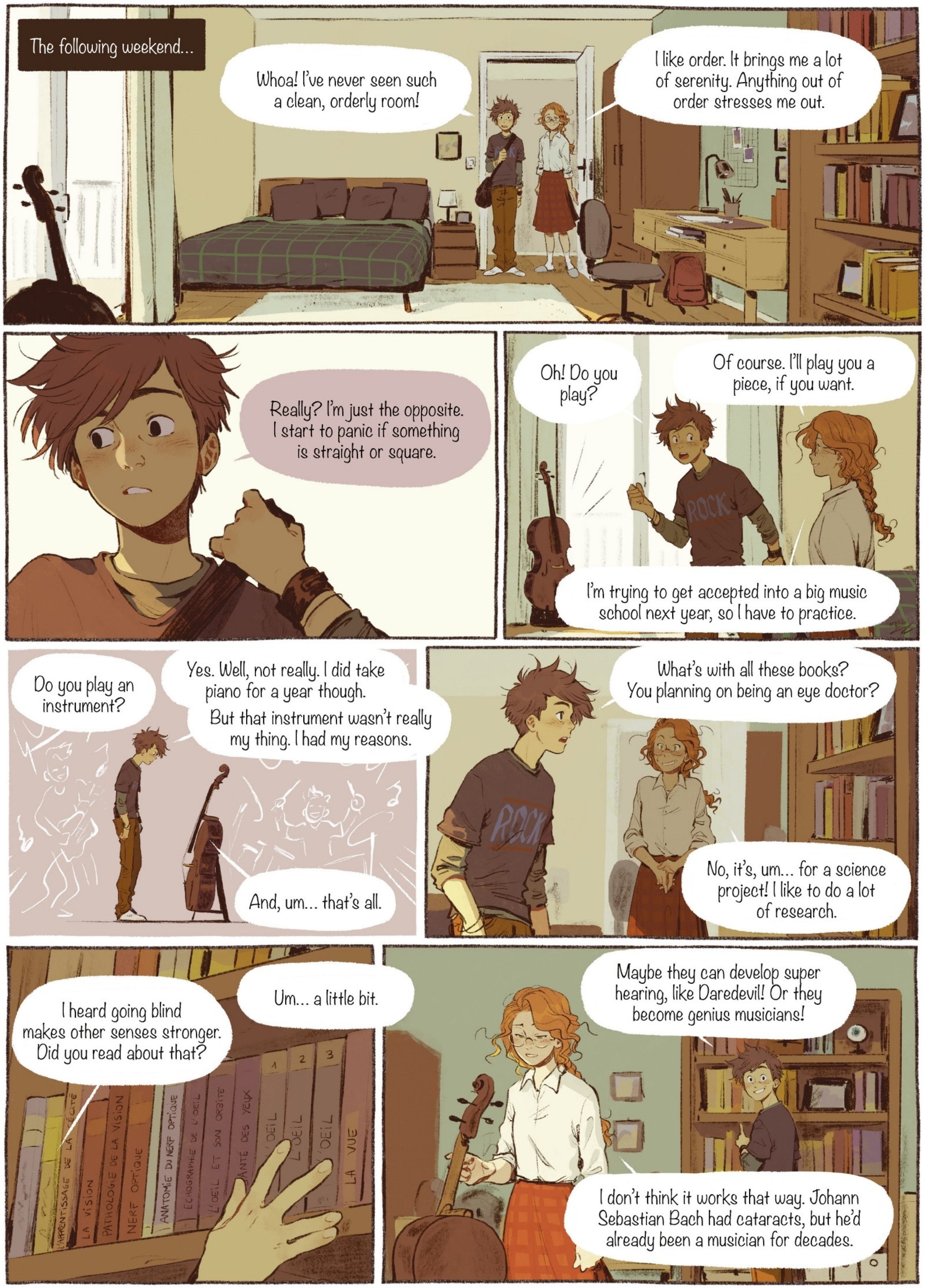

x-2(4x+1)=4(2x)+2
?
?
x-2(4x+1)=4(2x)+2
x-8x-2 = 4(2-x)+2
-7x-2 = 4(2-x)+2
-7x-2 = -4x+8+2
-3x-2 = -4x+10
-3x-2 = 10
-3x = 12
x = -4
FIRST NAME:
LAST NAME:
MATH TES
. SOLVE FOR x.
x-2(4x+1)= 4(2-

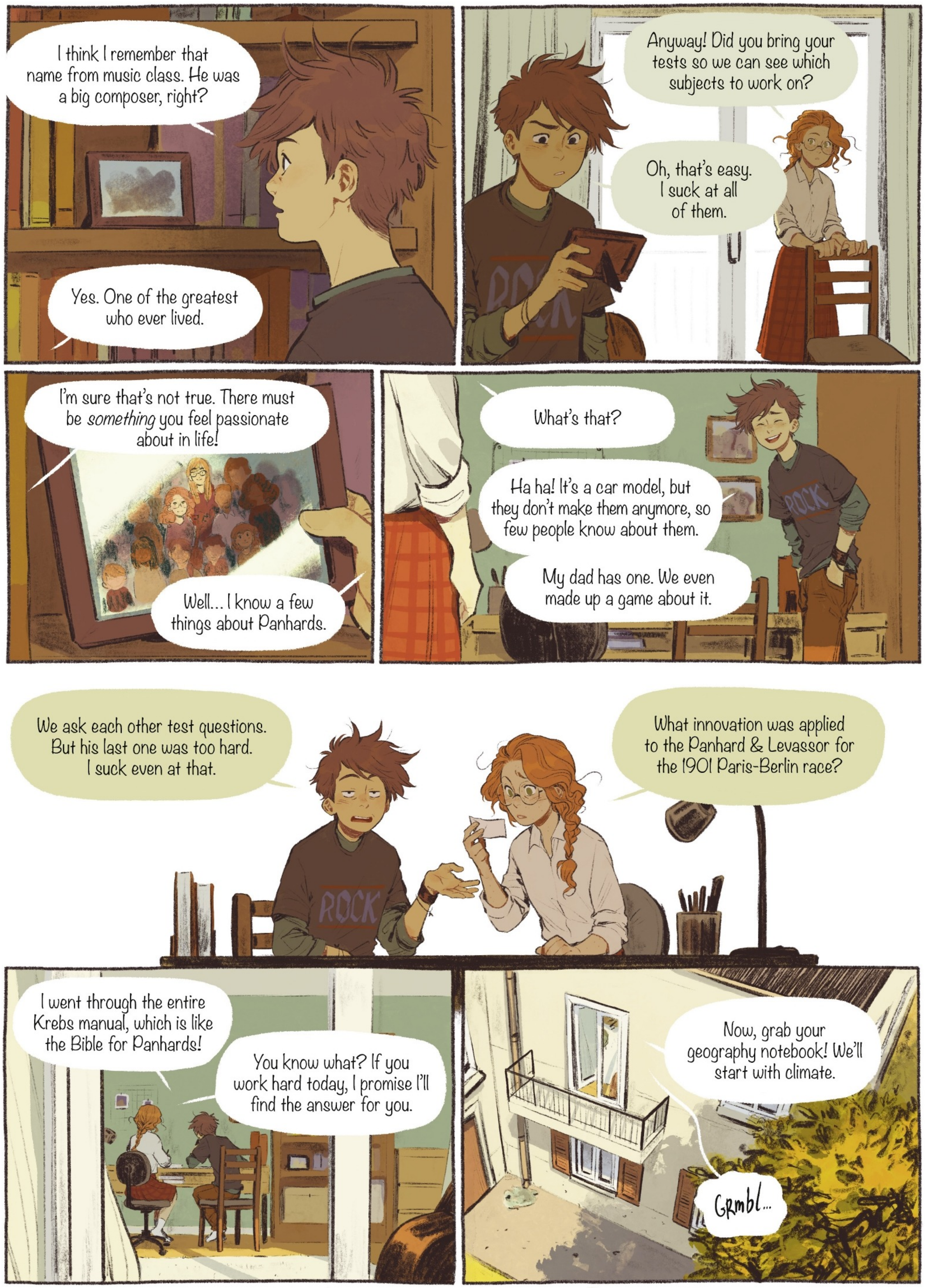

DRiiiiiNG!!
How'd it go?
Okay, I think. I hope…
So how was that test?
Fine, I guess… I'm going to bed. I'm pooped.
You big idiot! What did you do?? Why was she cheating? Why did you cheat by copying off her? Why did you lie to your dad and best friend? Why do you never stop to think?
You'll never measure up.

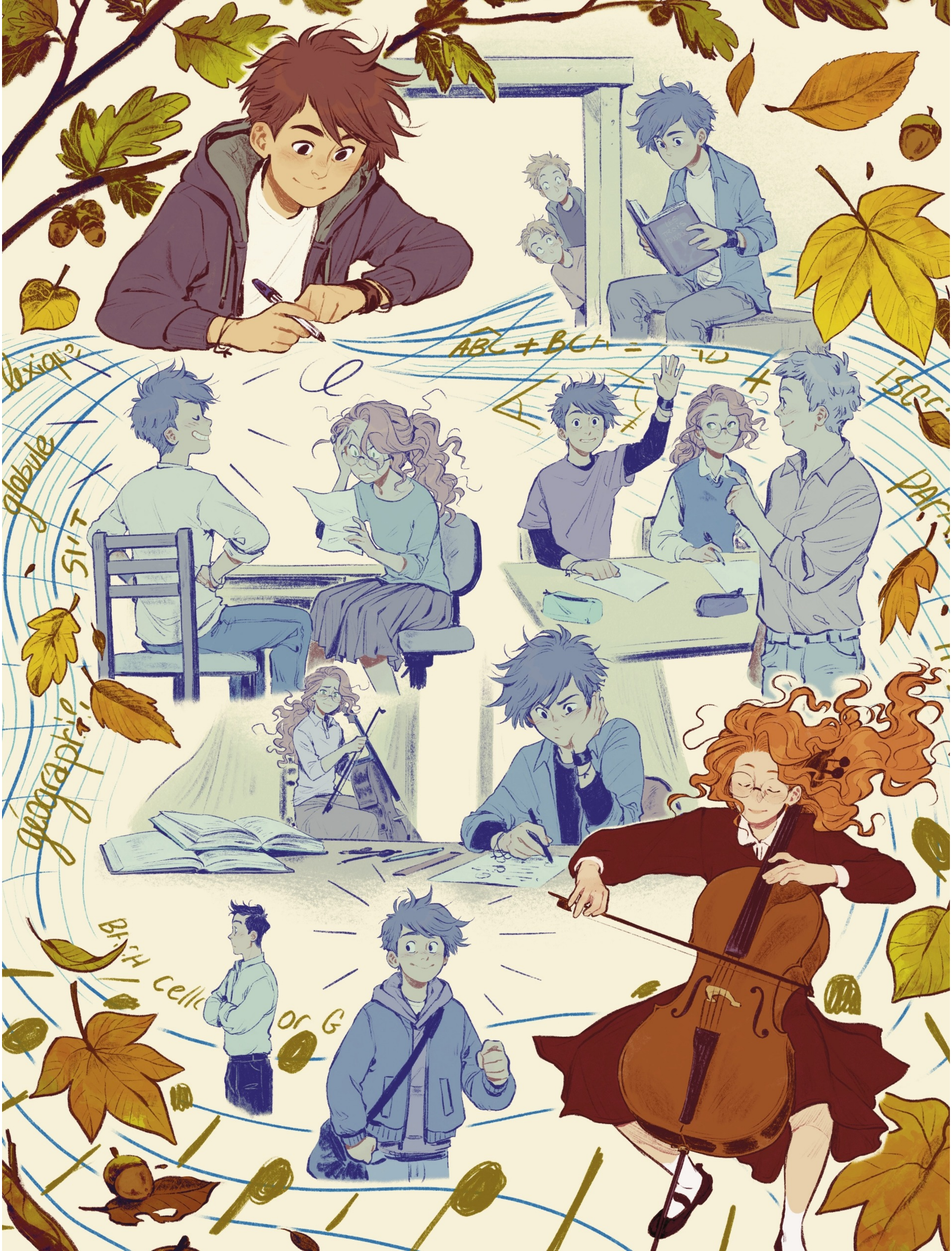

A week later...
I'm giving you back your tests today. Two of the grades came as a big surprise!
Victor: A+. No more excuses from now on! You just proved that when you actually apply yourself, you can succeed. So I'll be expecting a lot more of this from you.
!
You even got a better grade than Marie-Jo, who made a big mistake near the end. That's proof you didn't cheat and copy from her.
?!
Marie-Jo, what happened? I wasn't expecting this!
Neither was I... I'll be more careful next time!
I heard you had a breakaway of your own today, Victor! Great job on that test!
Oh, um... Thanks!
You coming, Vic? Dad and I are playing the fifth round of the Curacao tournament of 1962. Bobby Fischer against Viktor Kortchnoi.
Um... Sorry, man. My dad's waiting for me to do his rounds. I'll be there for the next match, I promise!
Hmm...

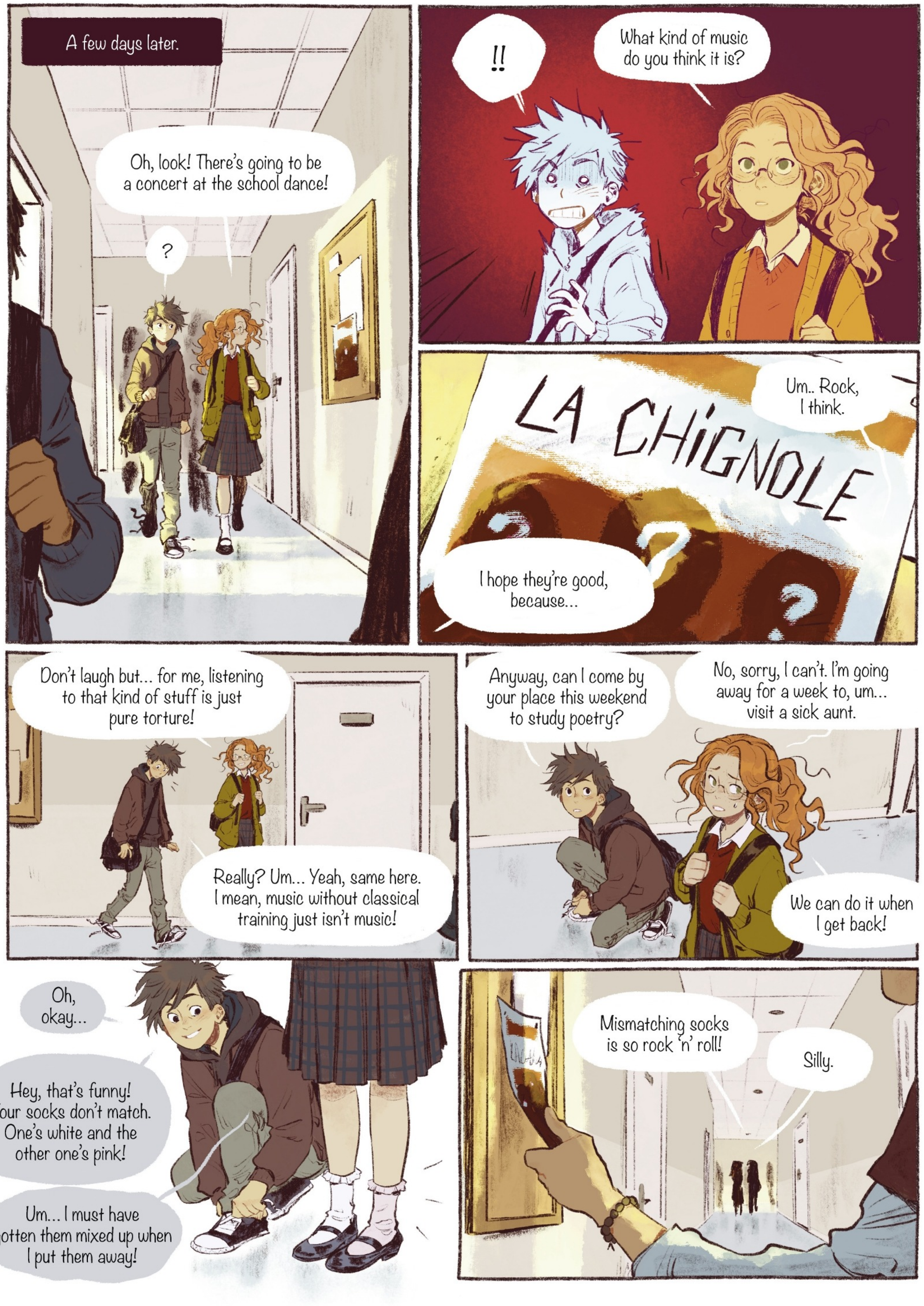

Marie-Jo!
AAh!
You scared me!
Victor??
I'm freaking out! This is a disaster! Everybody thinks I'm this A student now!
But we both know I'm not! I only got that grade because you were cheating and then *I* saw and cheated off *you!*
So?
So I can't keep it up! I'll bomb the next one like always and everyone will be disappointed in me! It's going to be horrible!
I'm sorry. I wasn't trying to get you involved...
I don't know why I did it. Or why you did it either!
I wasn't thinking... And it's not like me to do that. Cheat, I mean. *And* not thinking things through.
But you'll be fine! You always get good grades. I'm the one who's stuck in a huge mess now.
Unless...

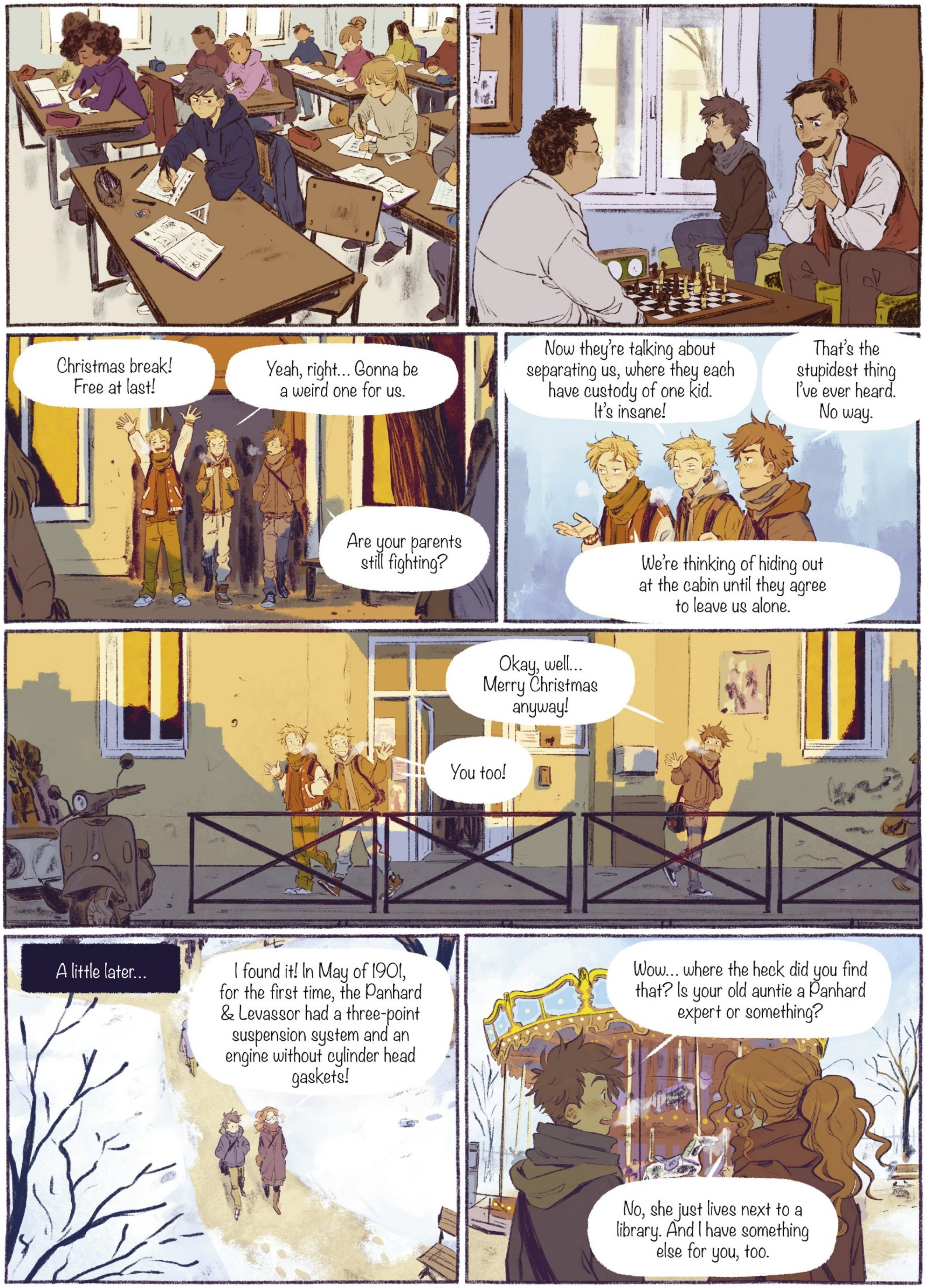

Unless what? I'm not going to cheat again!
No, not that! I was going to suggest you come study at my place over the break.
I could help you catch up on everything. You could get better grades legitimately.
I need... to think about it.
Hey, did you make that mistake so she wouldn't know?
Um... Yes, I definitely did!
You're a better cheater than I am!
What's with the face, kiddo? You should be happy! You got the best mark in the class!
Lucky Luke told me.
Yeah...
Ah, complicated teenage moods. Happy one day and down the next.
I'm going to my room.
At least study the Krebs manual! I've got some tough questions lined up that'll stump you for sure!

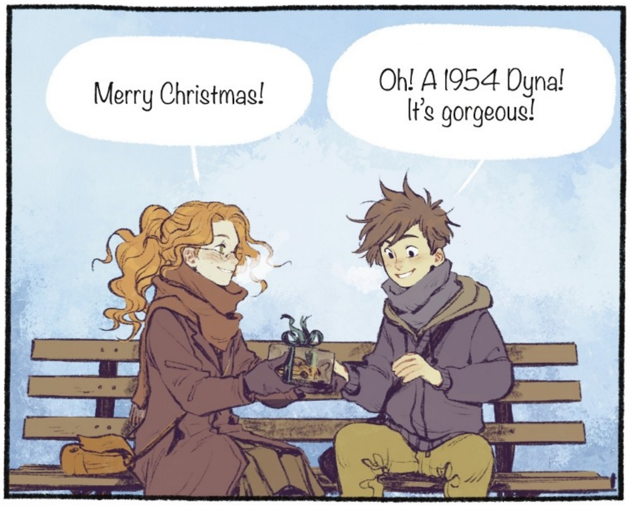

The following weekend...
Whoa! I've never seen such a clean, orderly room!
I like order. It brings me a lot of serenity. Anything out of order stresses me out.
Really? I'm just the opposite. I start to panic if something is straight or square.
Oh! Do you play?
Of course. I'll play you a piece, if you want.
ROCK
I'm trying to get accepted into a big music school next year, so I have to practice.
Do you play an instrument?
Yes. Well, not really. I did take piano for a year though.
But that instrument wasn't really my thing. I had my reasons.
And, um... that's all.
What's with all these books? You planning on being an eye doctor?
ROCK
No, it's, um... for a science project! I like to do a lot of research.
I heard going blind makes other senses stronger. Did you read about that?
Um... a little bit.
L'APPRENTISSAGE DE LA CÉCITÉ
LA VISION
PATHOLOGIE DE LA VISION
NERF OPTIQUE
ANATOMIE DU NERF OPTIQUE
ÉCHOGRAPHIE DE L'OEIL
L'OEIL ET SON ORBITE
ANTÉ DES YEUX
1 L'OEIL
2 L'OEIL
3 L'OEIL
LA VUE
Maybe they can develop super hearing, like Daredevil! Or they become genius musicians!
I don't think it works that way. Johann Sebastian Bach had cataracts, but he'd already been a musician for decades.

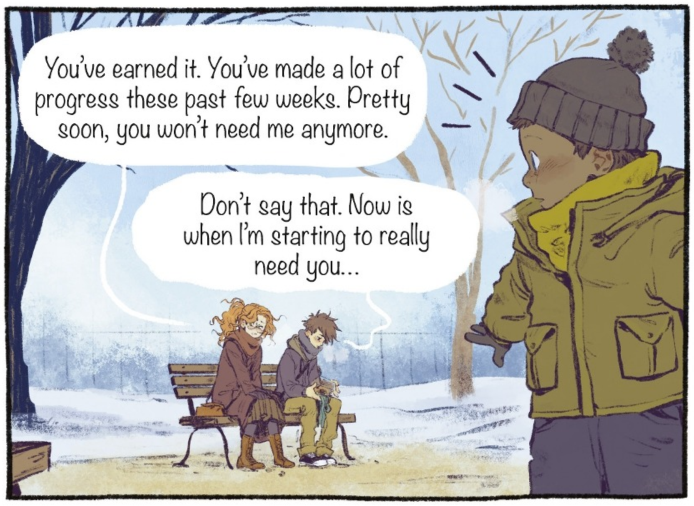

I think I remember that name from music class. He was a big composer, right?
Yes. One of the greatest who ever lived.
Anyway! Did you bring your tests so we can see which subjects to work on?
Oh, that's easy. I suck at all of them.
I'm sure that's not true. There must be *something* you feel passionate about in life!
Well... I know a few things about Panhards.
What's that?
Ha ha! It's a car model, but they don't make them anymore, so few people know about them.
My dad has one. We even made up a game about it.
We ask each other test questions. But his last one was too hard. I suck even at that.
What innovation was applied to the Panhard & Levassor for the 1901 Paris-Berlin race?
I went through the entire Krebs manual, which is like the Bible for Panhards!
You know what? If you work hard today, I promise I'll find the answer for you.
Now, grab your geography notebook! We'll start with climate.
Grmbl...

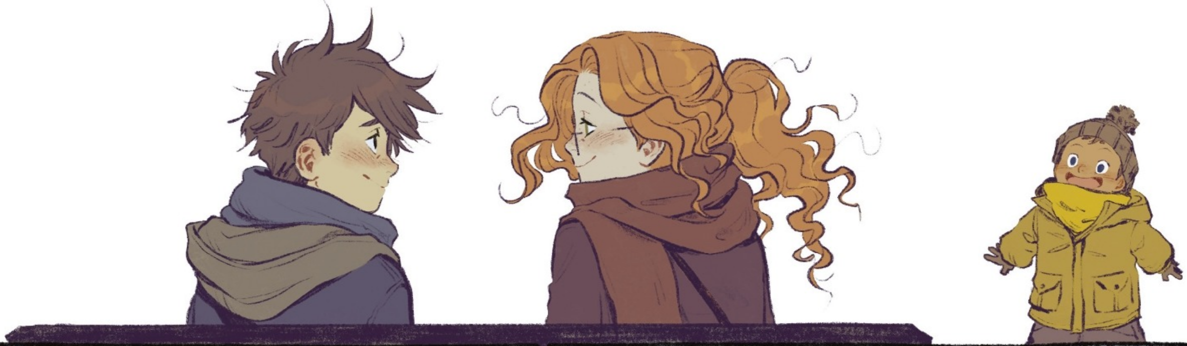

lexiqu
globule
SVT
géographie
ABC + BCA =
cello
or G

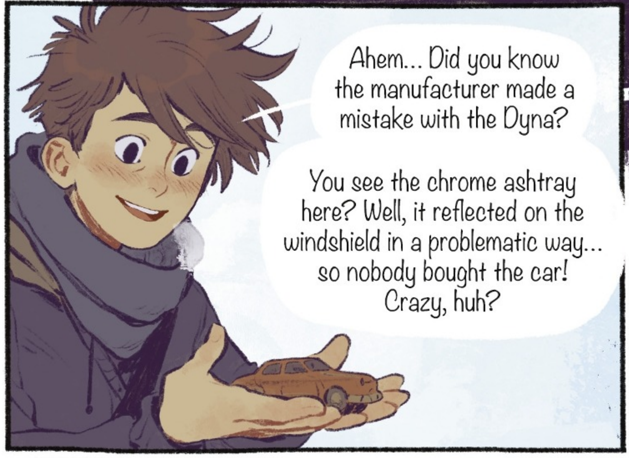

A few days later.
Oh, look! There's going to be a concert at the school dance!
?
!!
What kind of music do you think it is?
LA CHIGNOLE
Um.. Rock, I think.
I hope they're good, because...
Don't laugh but... for me, listening to that kind of stuff is just pure torture!
Really? Um... Yeah, same here. I mean, music without classical training just isn't music!
Anyway, can I come by your place this weekend to study poetry?
No, sorry, I can't. I'm going away for a week to, um... visit a sick aunt.
We can do it when I get back!
Oh, okay...
Hey, that's funny! Your socks don't match. One's white and the other one's pink!
Um... I must have gotten them mixed up when I put them away!
Mismatching socks is so rock 'n' roll!
Silly.

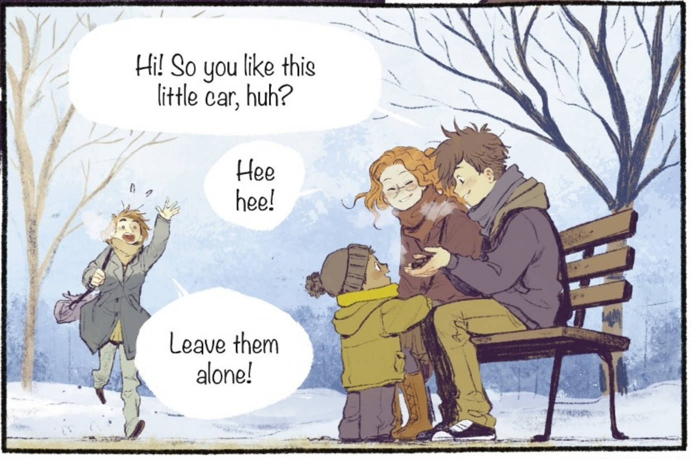

Christmas break! Free at last!
Yeah, right... Gonna be a weird one for us.
Are your parents still fighting?
Now they're talking about separating us, where they each have custody of one kid. It's insane!
That's the stupidest thing I've ever heard. No way.
We're thinking of hiding out at the cabin until they agree to leave us alone.
Okay, well... Merry Christmas anyway!
You too!
A little later...
I found it! In May of 1901, for the first time, the Panhard & Levassor had a three-point suspension system and an engine without cylinder head gaskets!
Wow... where the heck did you find that? Is your old auntie a Panhard expert or something?
No, she just lives next to a library. And I have something else for you, too.

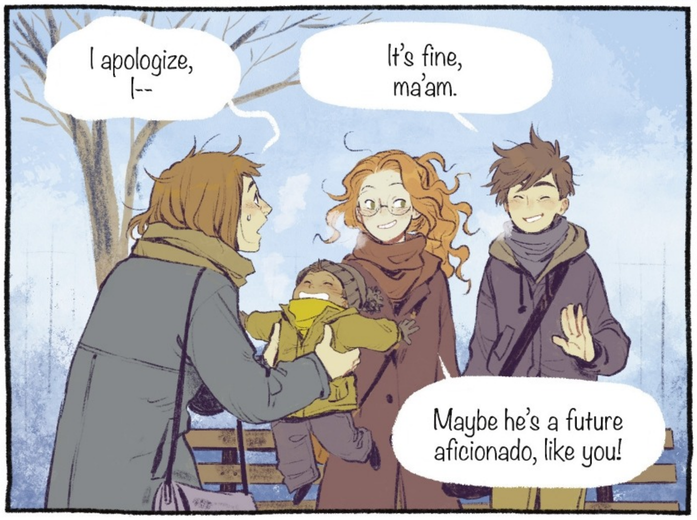

Merry Christmas!
Oh! A 1954 Dyna! It's gorgeous!

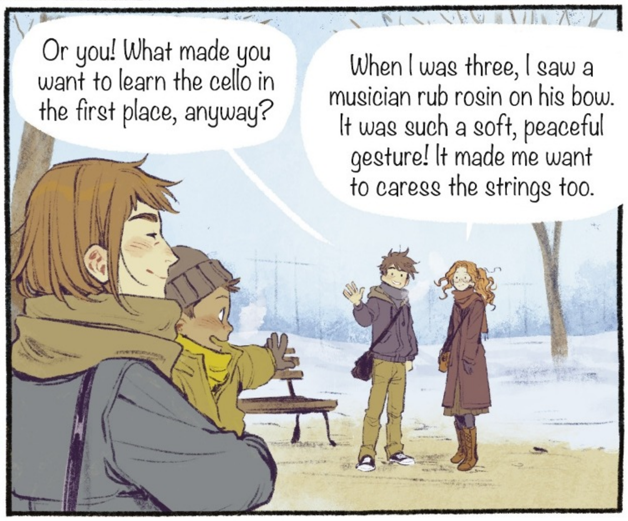

You've earned it. You've made a lot of progress these past few weeks. Pretty soon, you won't need me anymore.
Don't say that. Now is when I'm starting to really need you...

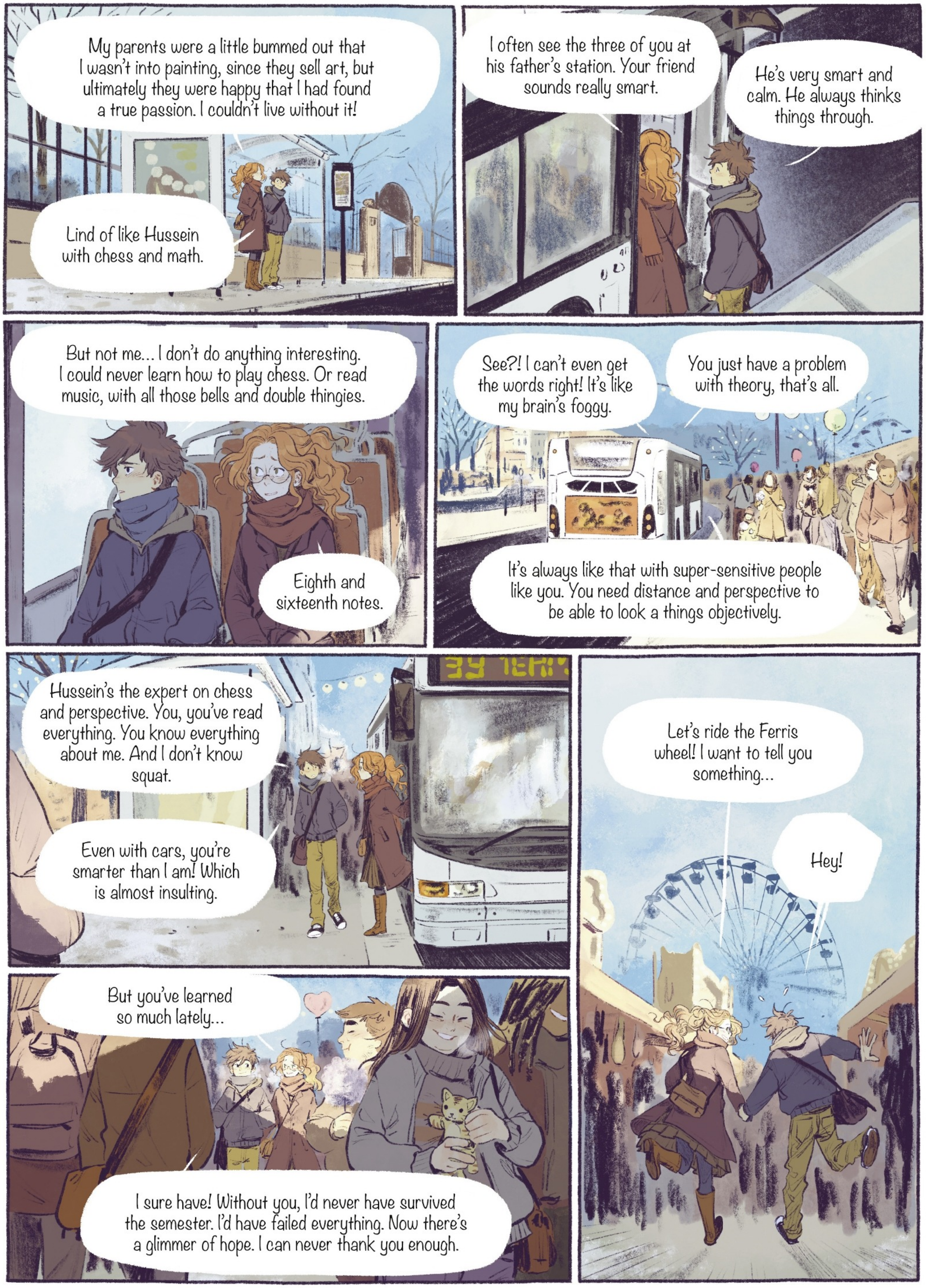


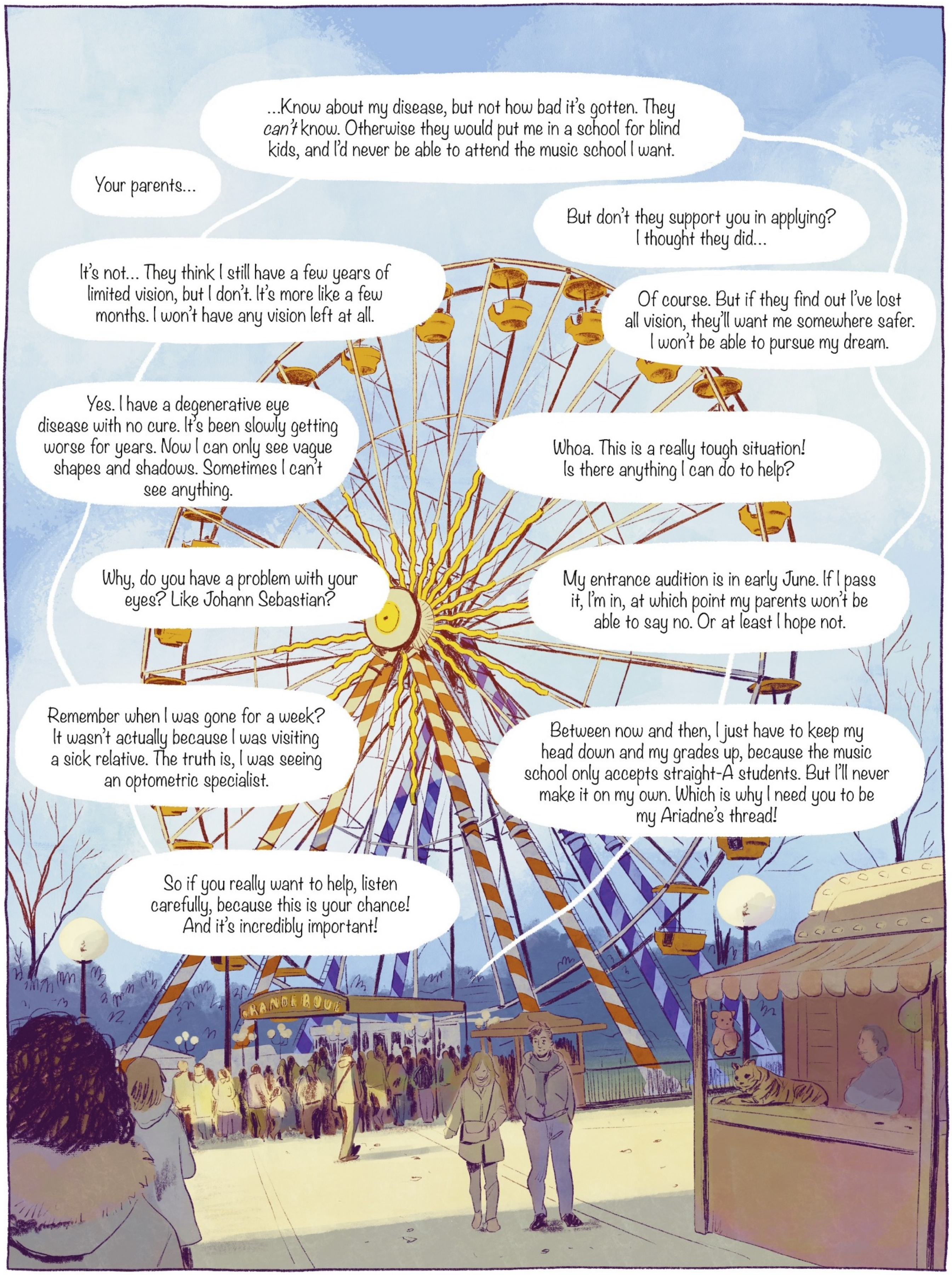

Ahem... Did you know the manufacturer made a mistake with the Dyna?
You see the chrome ashtray here? Well, it reflected on the windshield in a problematic way... so nobody bought the car! Crazy, huh?

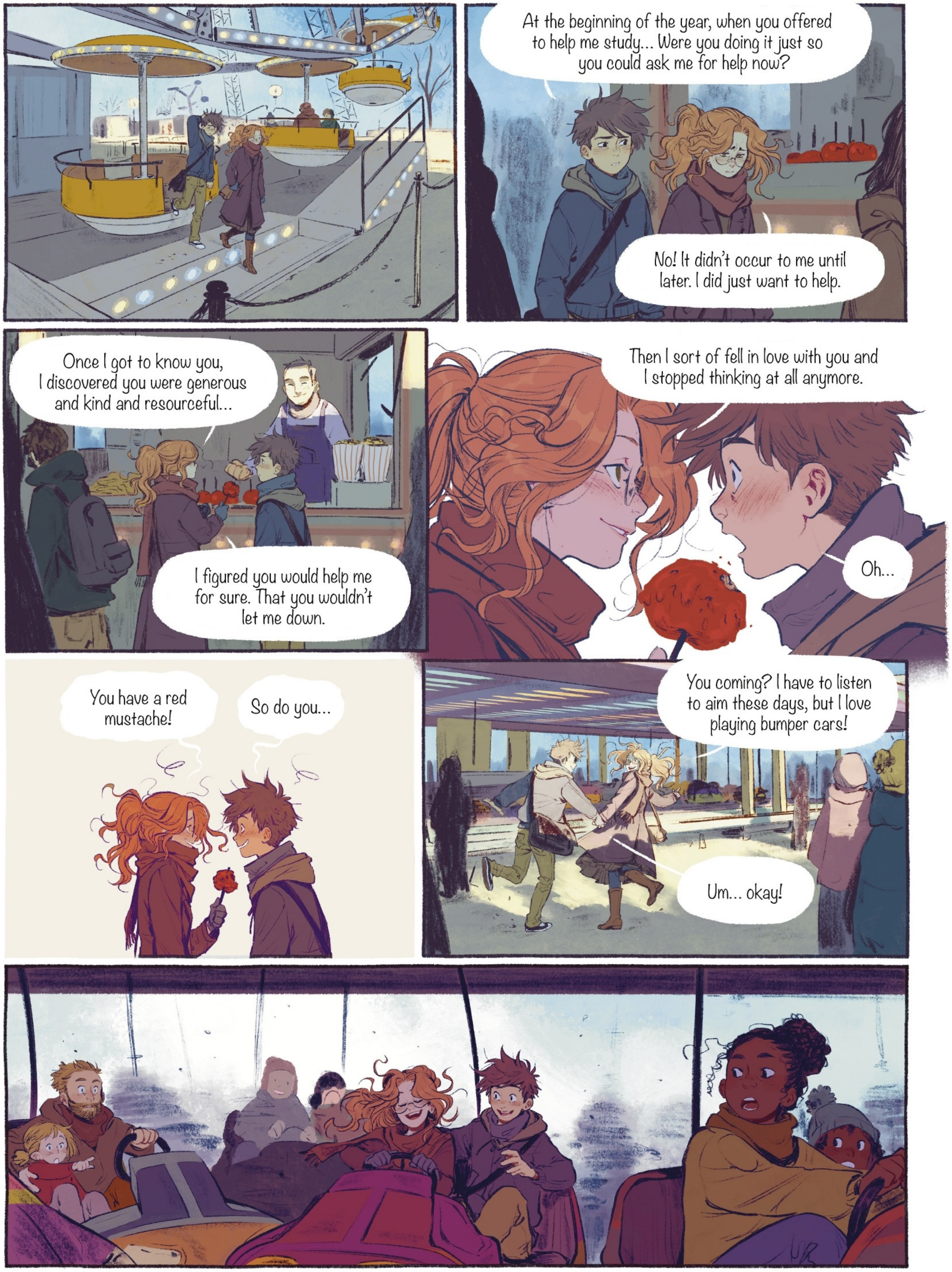

Hi! So you like this little car, huh?
Hee hee!
Leave them alone!

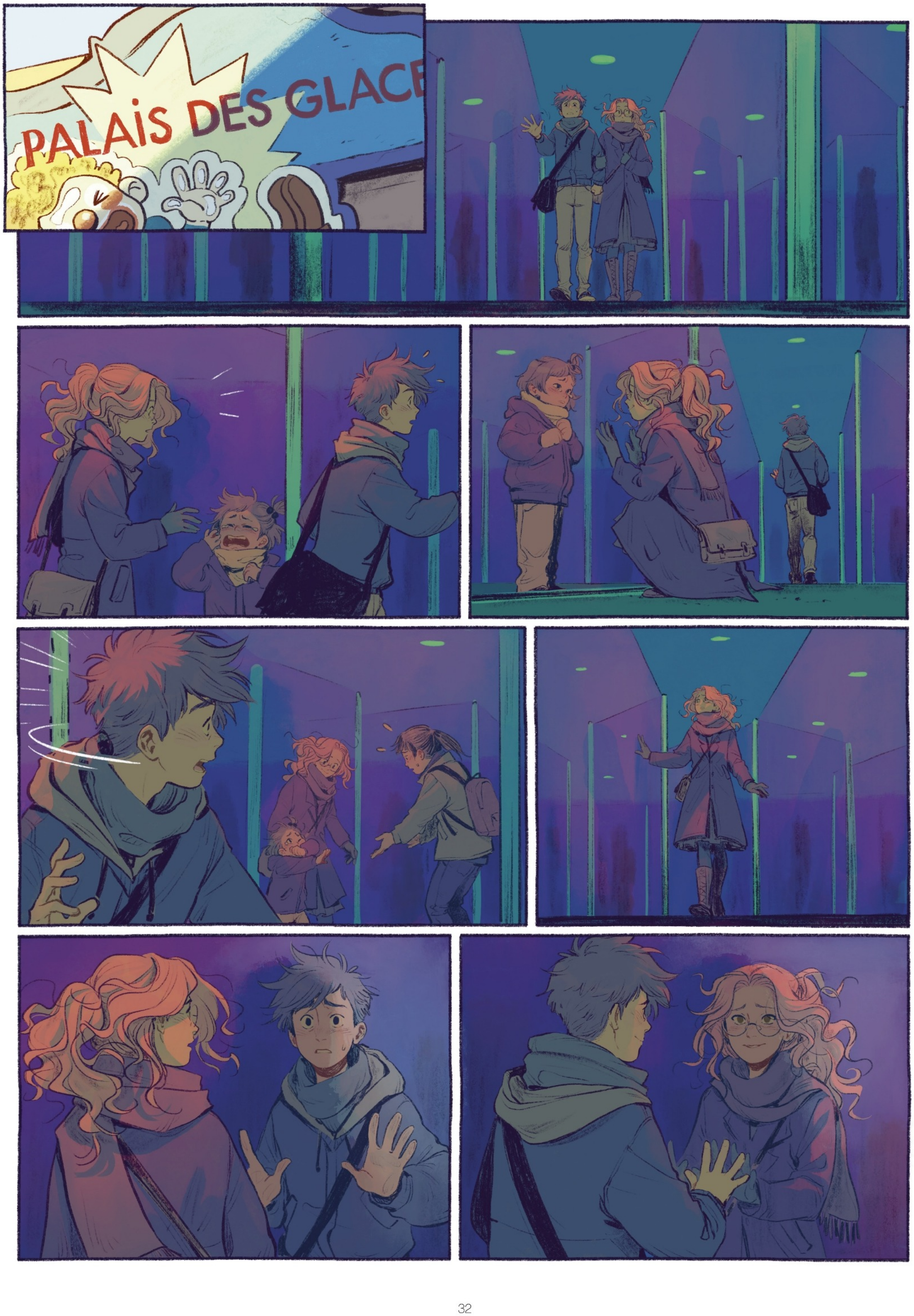

I apologize, I--
It's fine, ma'am.
Maybe he's a future aficionado, like you!

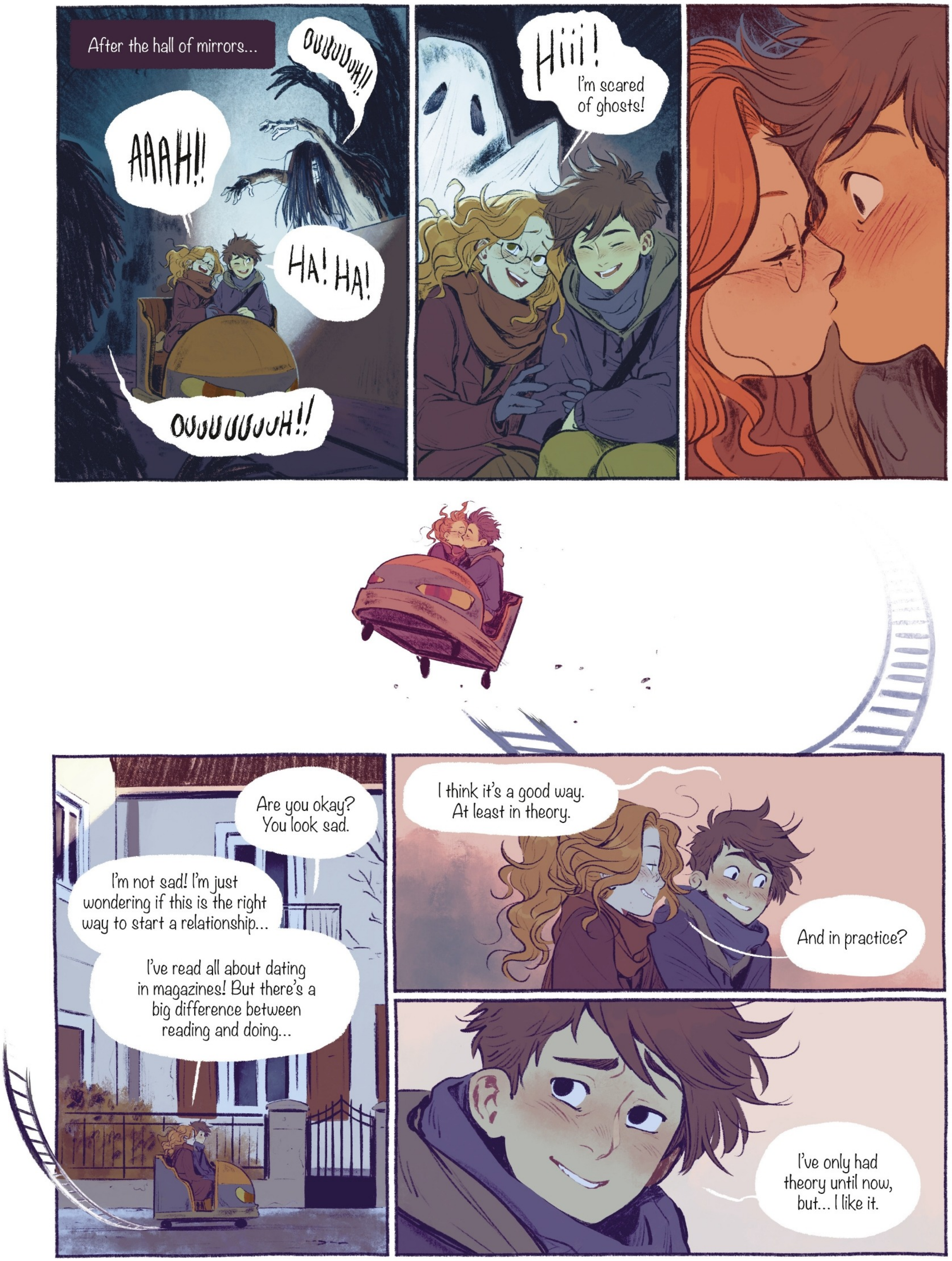

Or you! What made you want to learn the cello in the first place, anyway?
When I was three, I saw a musician rub rosin on his bow. It was such a soft, peaceful gesture! It made me want to caress the strings too.

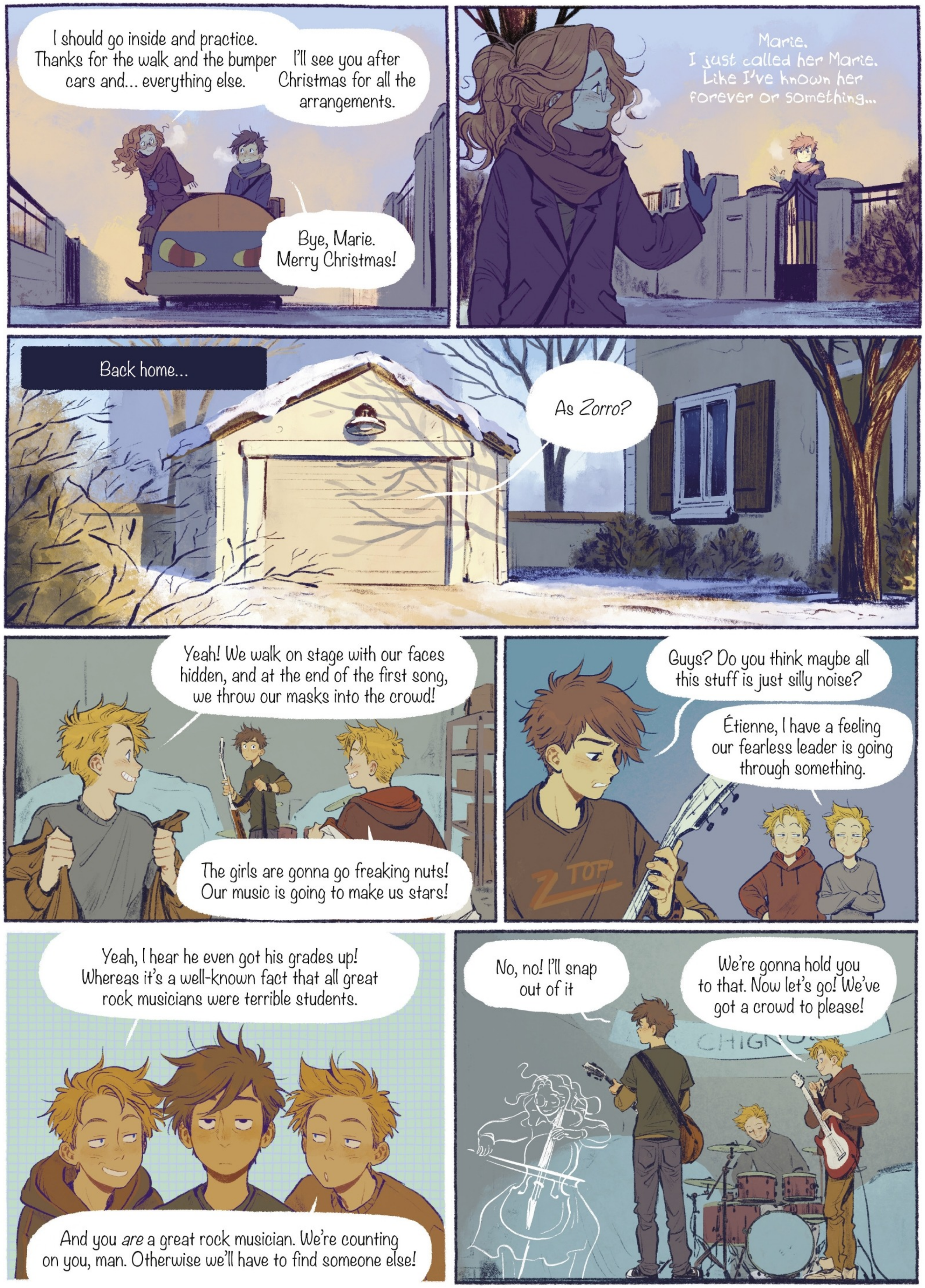

My parents were a little bummed out that I wasn't into painting, since they sell art, but ultimately they were happy that I had found a true passion. I couldn't live without it!
Lind of like Hussein with chess and math.
I often see the three of you at his father's station. Your friend sounds really smart.
He's very smart and calm. He always thinks things through.
But not me... I don't do anything interesting. I could never learn how to play chess. Or read music, with all those bells and double thingies.
Eighth and sixteenth notes.
See?! I can't even get the words right! It's like my brain's foggy.
You just have a problem with theory, that's all.
It's always like that with super-sensitive people like you. You need distance and perspective to be able to look a things objectively.
39 TERM
Hussein's the expert on chess and perspective. You, you've read everything. You know everything about me. And I don't know squat.
Even with cars, you're smarter than I am! Which is almost insulting.
Let's ride the Ferris wheel! I want to tell you something...
Hey!
But you've learned so much lately...
I sure have! Without you, I'd never have survived the semester. I'd have failed everything. Now there's a glimmer of hope. I can never thank you enough.

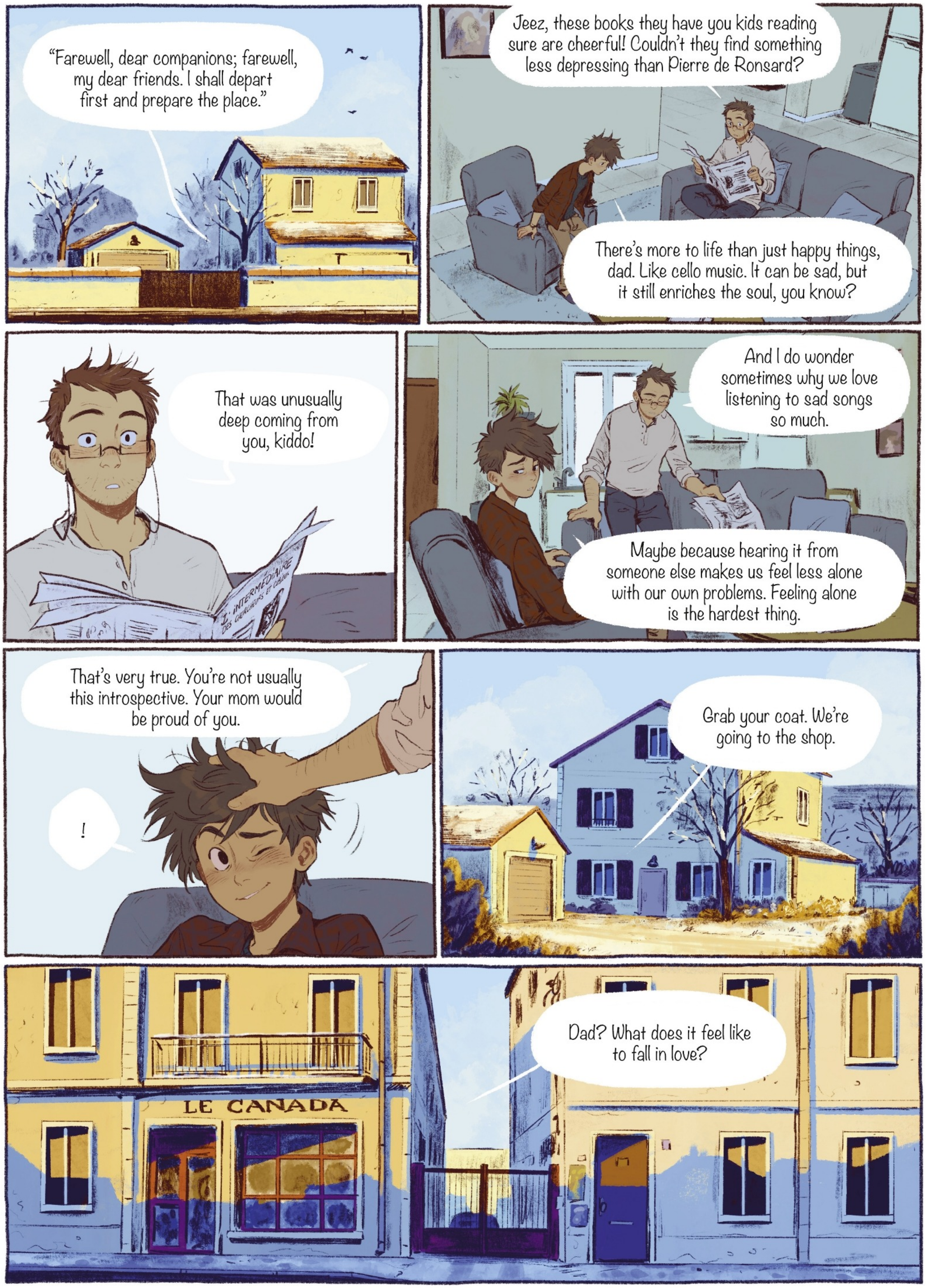

So if you really want to help, listen carefully, because this is your chance! And it's incredibly important!
Remember when I was gone for a week? It wasn't actually because I was visiting a sick relative. The truth is, I was seeing an optometric specialist.
Why, do you have a problem with your eyes? Like Johann Sebastian?
Yes. I have a degenerative eye disease with no cure. It's been slowly getting worse for years. Now I can only see vague shapes and shadows. Sometimes I can't see anything.
It's not... They think I still have a few years of limited vision, but I don't. It's more like a few months. I won't have any vision left at all.
Your parents...
...Know about my disease, but not how bad it's gotten. They *can't* know. Otherwise they would put me in a school for blind kids, and I'd never be able to attend the music school I want.
But don't they support you in applying? I thought they did...
Of course. But if they find out I've lost all vision, they'll want me somewhere safer. I won't be able to pursue my dream.
Whoa. This is a really tough situation! Is there anything I can do to help?
My entrance audition is in early June. If I pass it, I'm in, at which point my parents won't be able to say no. Or at least I hope not.
Between now and then, I just have to keep my head down and my grades up, because the music school only accepts straight-A students. But I'll never make it on my own. Which is why I need you to be my Ariadne's thread!
GRANDE ROUE

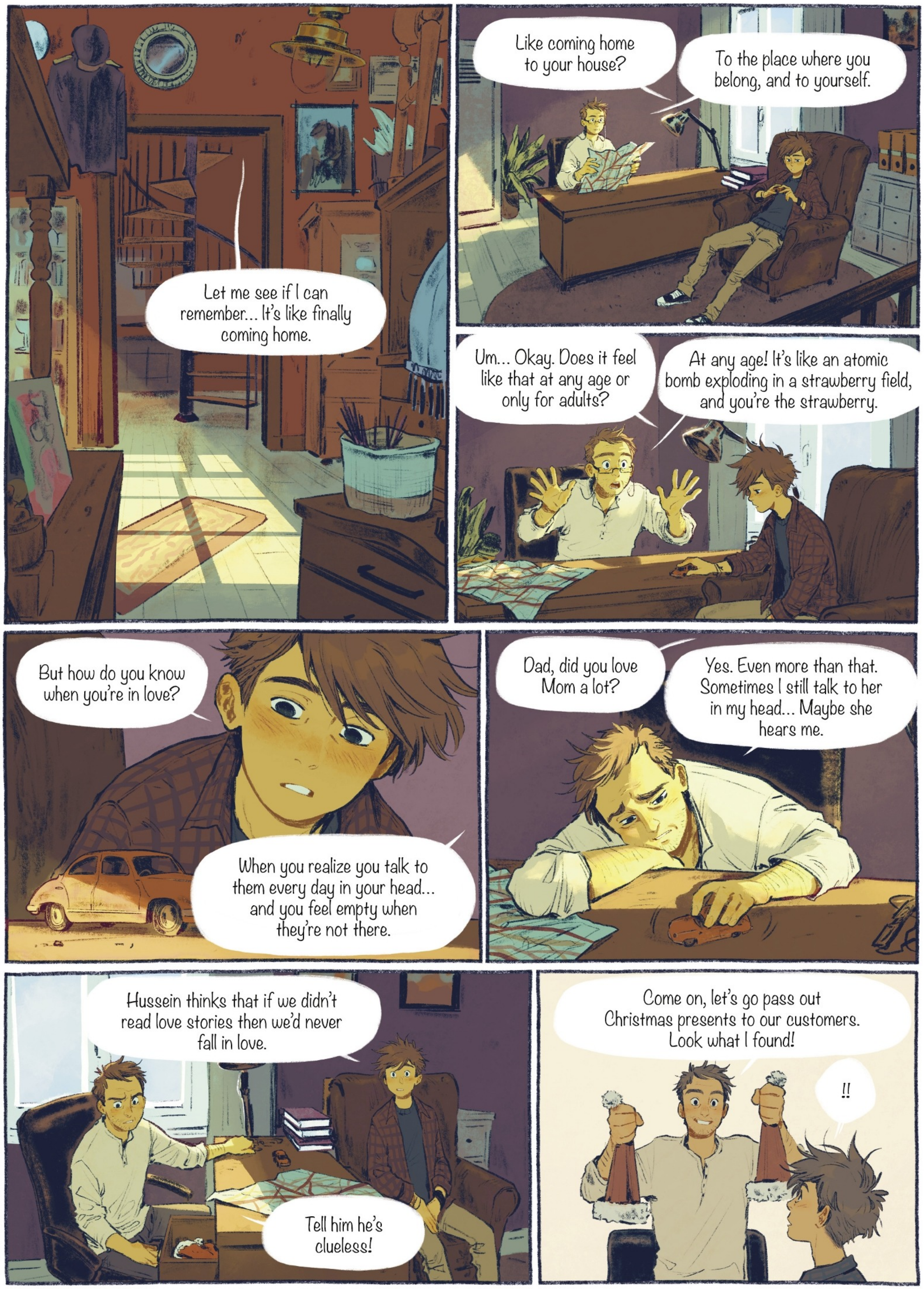

At the beginning of the year, when you offered to help me study... Were you doing it just so you could ask me for help now?
No! It didn't occur to me until later. I did just want to help.
Once I got to know you, I discovered you were generous and kind and resourceful...
I figured you would help me for sure. That you wouldn't let me down.
Then I sort of fell in love with you and I stopped thinking at all anymore.
Oh...
You have a red mustache!
So do you...
You coming? I have to listen to aim these days, but I love playing bumper cars!
Um... okay!

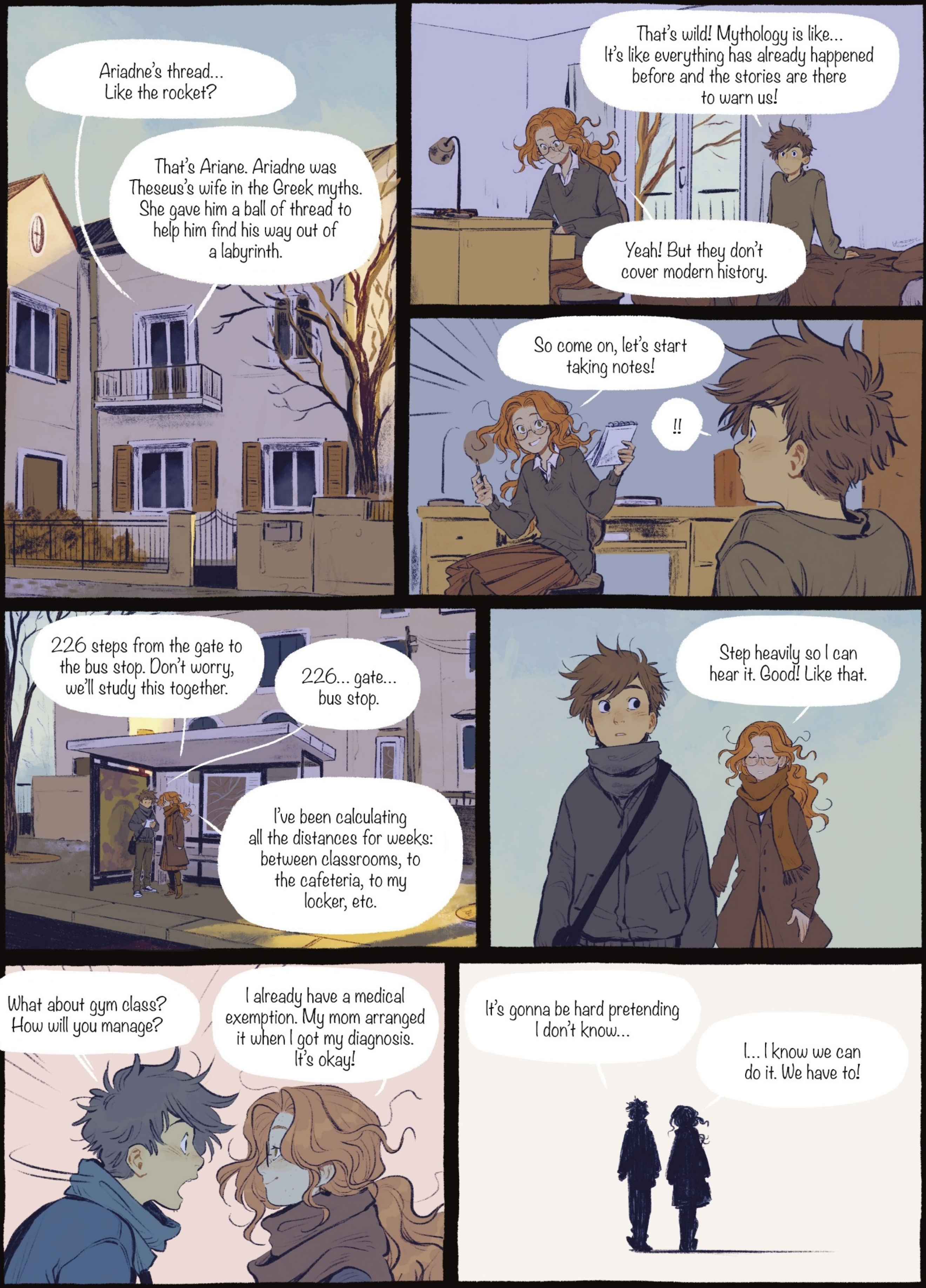

PALAiS DES GLACE

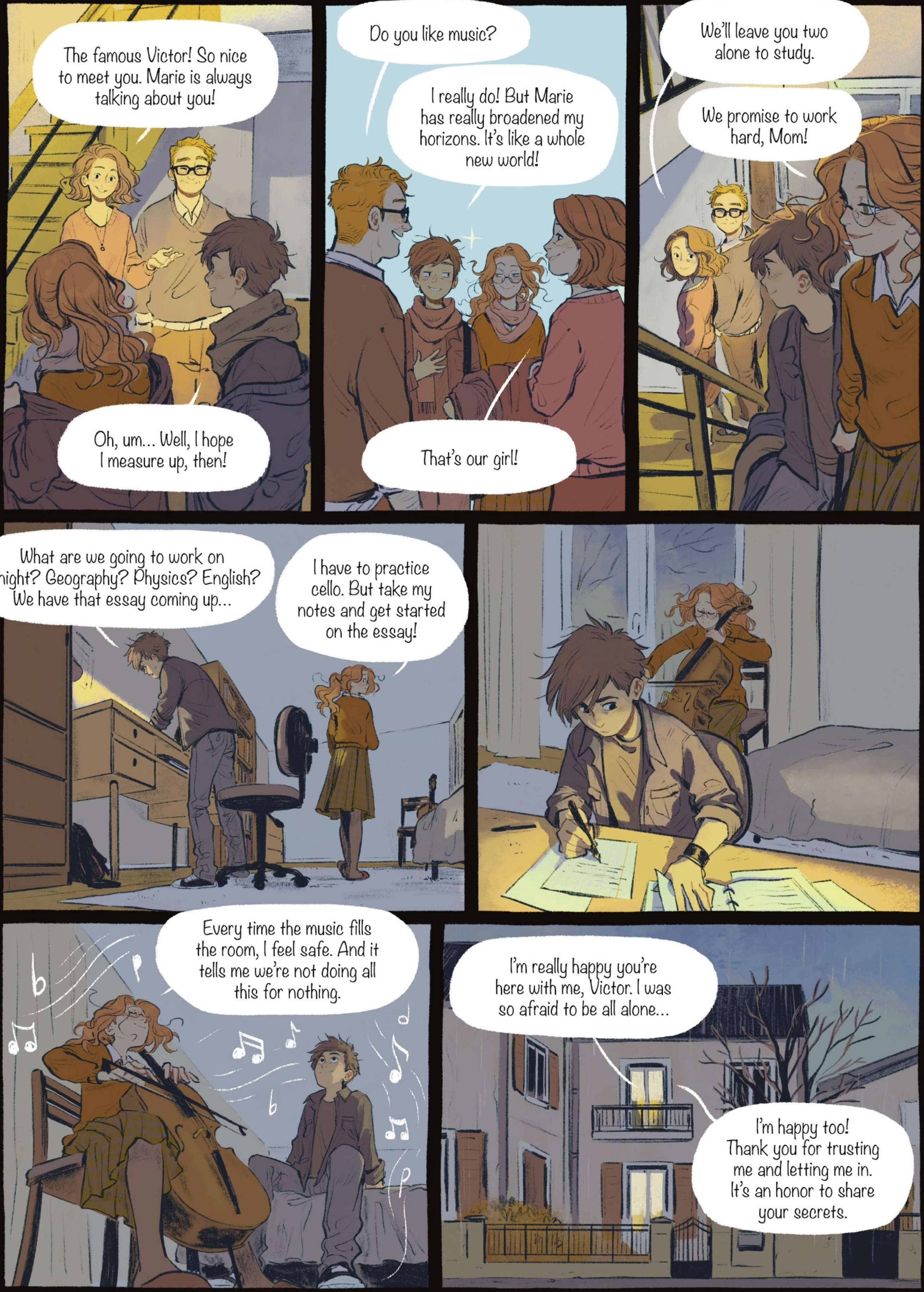

After the hall of mirrors...
OUUUUUH!!
AAAH!!
HA! HA!
OUUUUUUUH!!
Hiii!
I'm scared of ghosts!
Are you okay? You look sad.
I'm not sad! I'm just wondering if this is the right way to start a relationship...
I've read all about dating in magazines! But there's a big difference between reading and doing...
I think it's a good way. At least in theory.
And in practice?
I've only had theory until now, but... I like it.

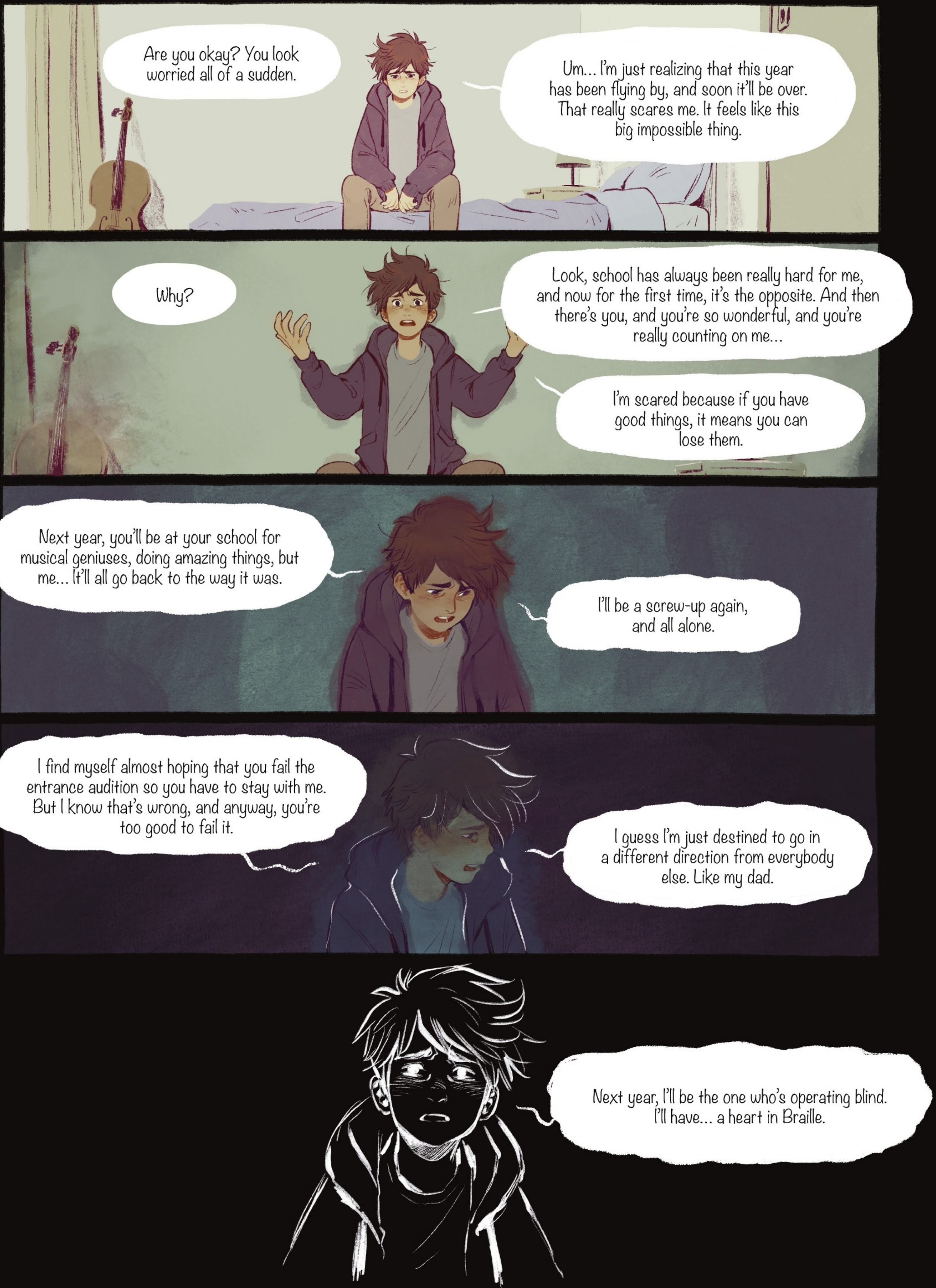

I should go inside and practice. Thanks for the walk and the bumper cars and… everything else.
I'll see you after Christmas for all the arrangements.
Bye, Marie. Merry Christmas!
Marie. I just called her Marie. Like I've known her forever or something…
Back home…
As Zorro?
Yeah! We walk on stage with our faces hidden, and at the end of the first song, we throw our masks into the crowd!
The girls are gonna go freaking nuts! Our music is going to make us stars!
Guys? Do you think maybe all this stuff is just silly noise?
Étienne, I have a feeling our fearless leader is going through something.
Yeah, I hear he even got his grades up! Whereas it's a well-known fact that all great rock musicians were terrible students.
And you *are* a great rock musician. We're counting on you, man. Otherwise we'll have to find someone else!
No, no! I'll snap out of it
We're gonna hold you to that. Now let's go! We've got a crowd to please!

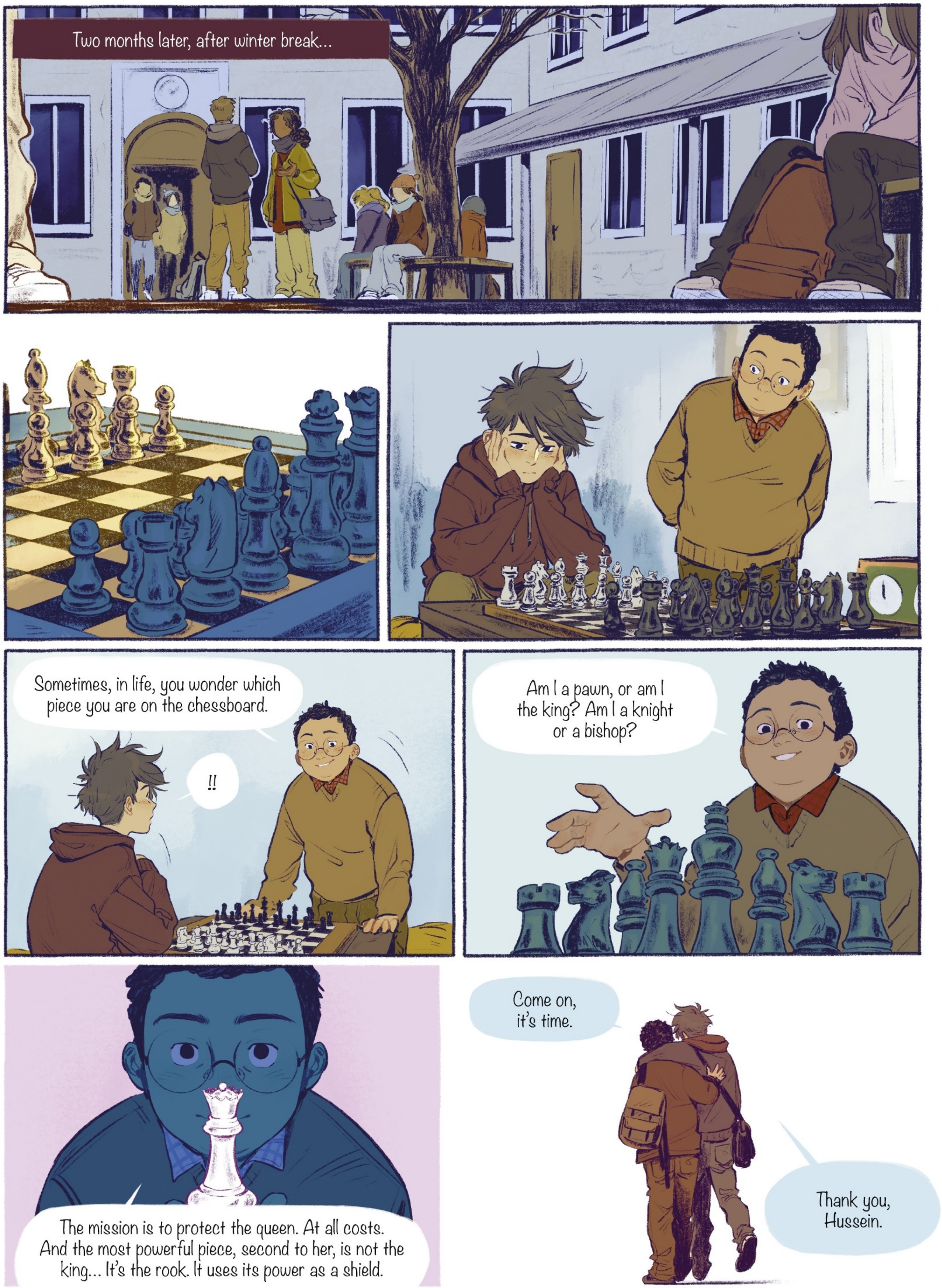

"Farewell, dear companions; farewell, my dear friends. I shall depart first and prepare the place."
Jeez, these books they have you kids reading sure are cheerful! Couldn't they find something less depressing than Pierre de Ronsard?
There's more to life than just happy things, dad. Like cello music. It can be sad, but it still enriches the soul, you know?
That was unusually deep coming from you, kiddo!
L'INTERMEDIAIRE DES CHERCHEURS ET CURIEUX
And I do wonder sometimes why we love listening to sad songs so much.
Maybe because hearing it from someone else makes us feel less alone with our own problems. Feeling alone is the hardest thing.
That's very true. You're not usually this introspective. Your mom would be proud of you.
!
Grab your coat. We're going to the shop.
LE CANADA
Dad? What does it feel like to fall in love?


Let me see if I can remember... It's like finally coming home.
Like coming home to your house?
To the place where you belong, and to yourself.
Um... Okay. Does it feel like that at any age or only for adults?
At any age! It's like an atomic bomb exploding in a strawberry field, and you're the strawberry.
But how do you know when you're in love?
When you realize you talk to them every day in your head... and you feel empty when they're not there.
Dad, did you love Mom a lot?
Yes. Even more than that. Sometimes I still talk to her in my head... Maybe she hears me.
Hussein thinks that if we didn't read love stories then we'd never fall in love.
Tell him he's clueless!
Come on, let's go pass out Christmas presents to our customers. Look what I found!
!!


Ariadne's thread... Like the rocket?
That's Ariane. Ariadne was Theseus's wife in the Greek myths. She gave him a ball of thread to help him find his way out of a labyrinth.
That's wild! Mythology is like... It's like everything has already happened before and the stories are there to warn us!
Yeah! But they don't cover modern history.
So come on, let's start taking notes!
!!
226 steps from the gate to the bus stop. Don't worry, we'll study this together.
226... gate... bus stop.
I've been calculating all the distances for weeks: between classrooms, to the cafeteria, to my locker, etc.
Step heavily so I can hear it. Good! Like that.
What about gym class? How will you manage?
I already have a medical exemption. My mom arranged it when I got my diagnosis. It's okay!
It's gonna be hard pretending I don't know...
I... I know we can do it. We have to!


The famous Victor! So nice to meet you. Marie is always talking about you!
Oh, um... Well, I hope I measure up, then!
Do you like music?
I really do! But Marie has really broadened my horizons. It's like a whole new world!
That's our girl!
We'll leave you two alone to study.
We promise to work hard, Mom!
What are we going to work on tonight? Geography? Physics? English? We have that essay coming up...
I have to practice cello. But take my notes and get started on the essay!
Every time the music fills the room, I feel safe. And it tells me we're not doing all this for nothing.
I'm really happy you're here with me, Victor. I was so afraid to be all alone...
I'm happy too! Thank you for trusting me and letting me in. It's an honor to share your secrets.


Are you okay? You look worried all of a sudden.
Um... I'm just realizing that this year has been flying by, and soon it'll be over. That really scares me. It feels like this big impossible thing.
Why?
Look, school has always been really hard for me, and now for the first time, it's the opposite. And then there's you, and you're so wonderful, and you're really counting on me...
I'm scared because if you have good things, it means you can lose them.
Next year, you'll be at your school for musical geniuses, doing amazing things, but me... It'll all go back to the way it was.
I'll be a screw-up again, and all alone.
I find myself almost hoping that you fail the entrance audition so you have to stay with me. But I know that's wrong, and anyway, you're too good to fail it.
I guess I'm just destined to go in a different direction from everybody else. Like my dad.
Next year, I'll be the one who's operating blind. I'll have... a heart in Braille.


Two months later, after winter break...
Sometimes, in life, you wonder which piece you are on the chessboard.
!!
Am I a pawn, or am I the king? Am I a knight or a bishop?
The mission is to protect the queen. At all costs. And the most powerful piece, second to her, is not the king... It's the rook. It uses its power as a shield.
Come on, it's time.
Thank you, Hussein.

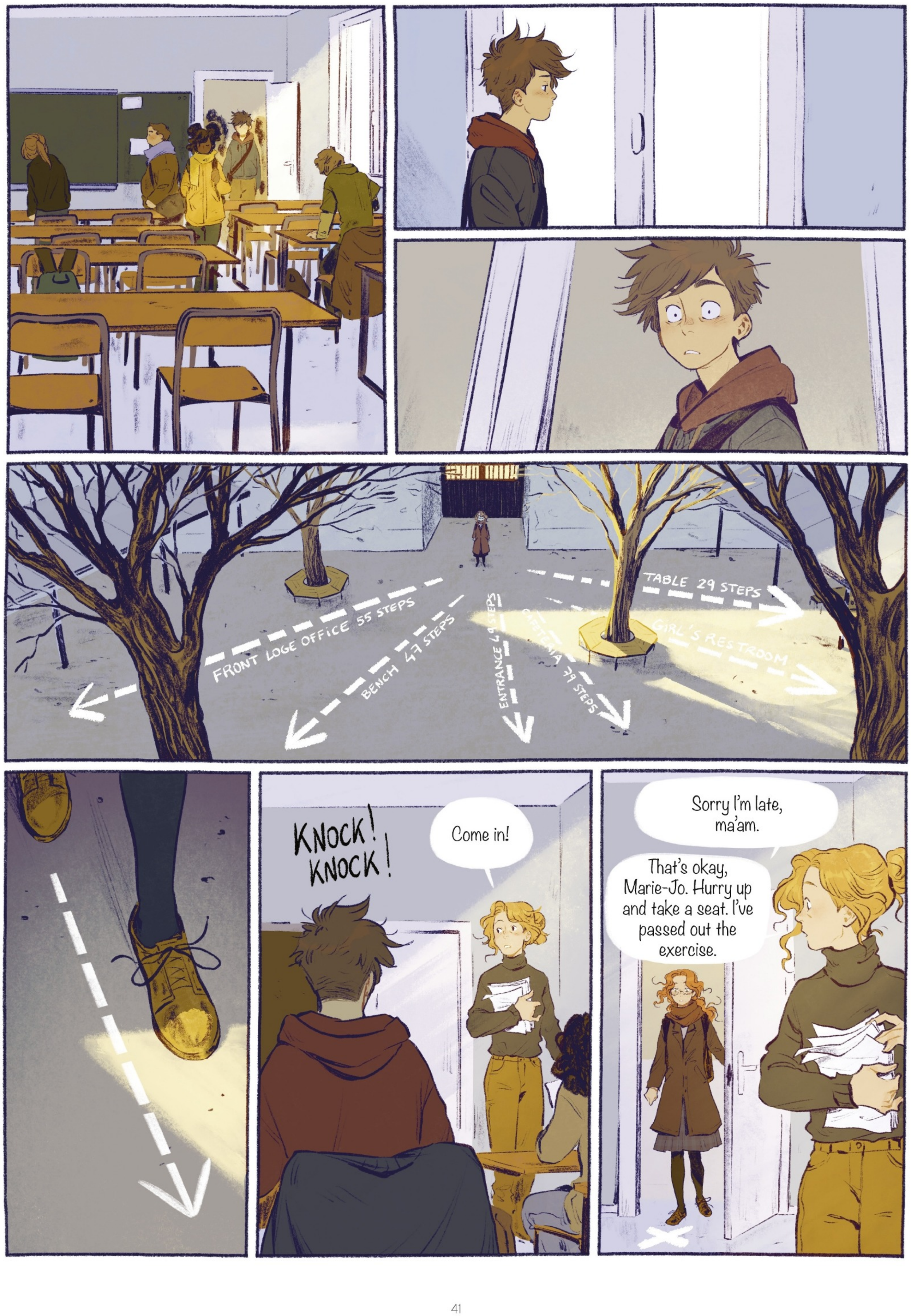
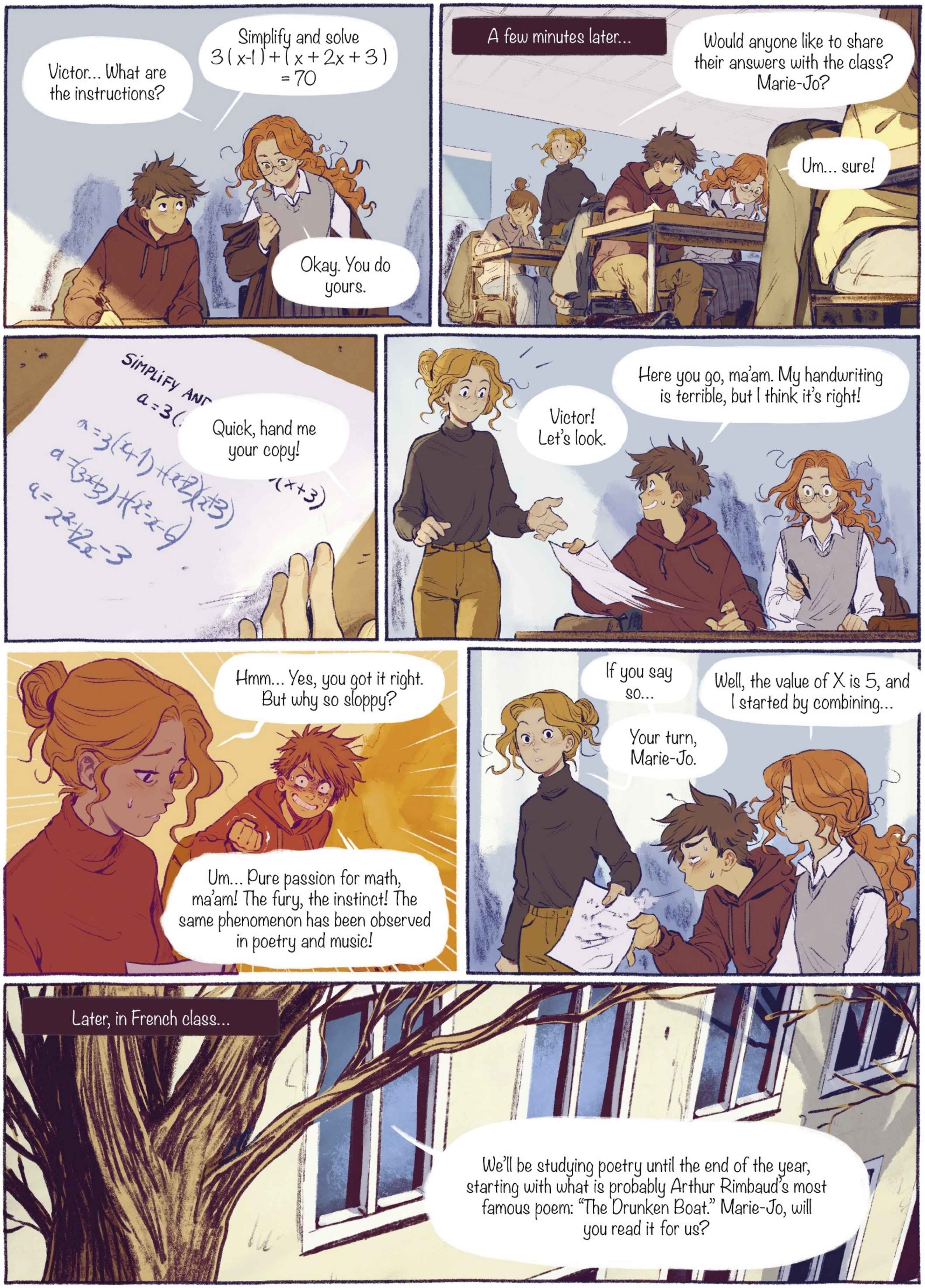
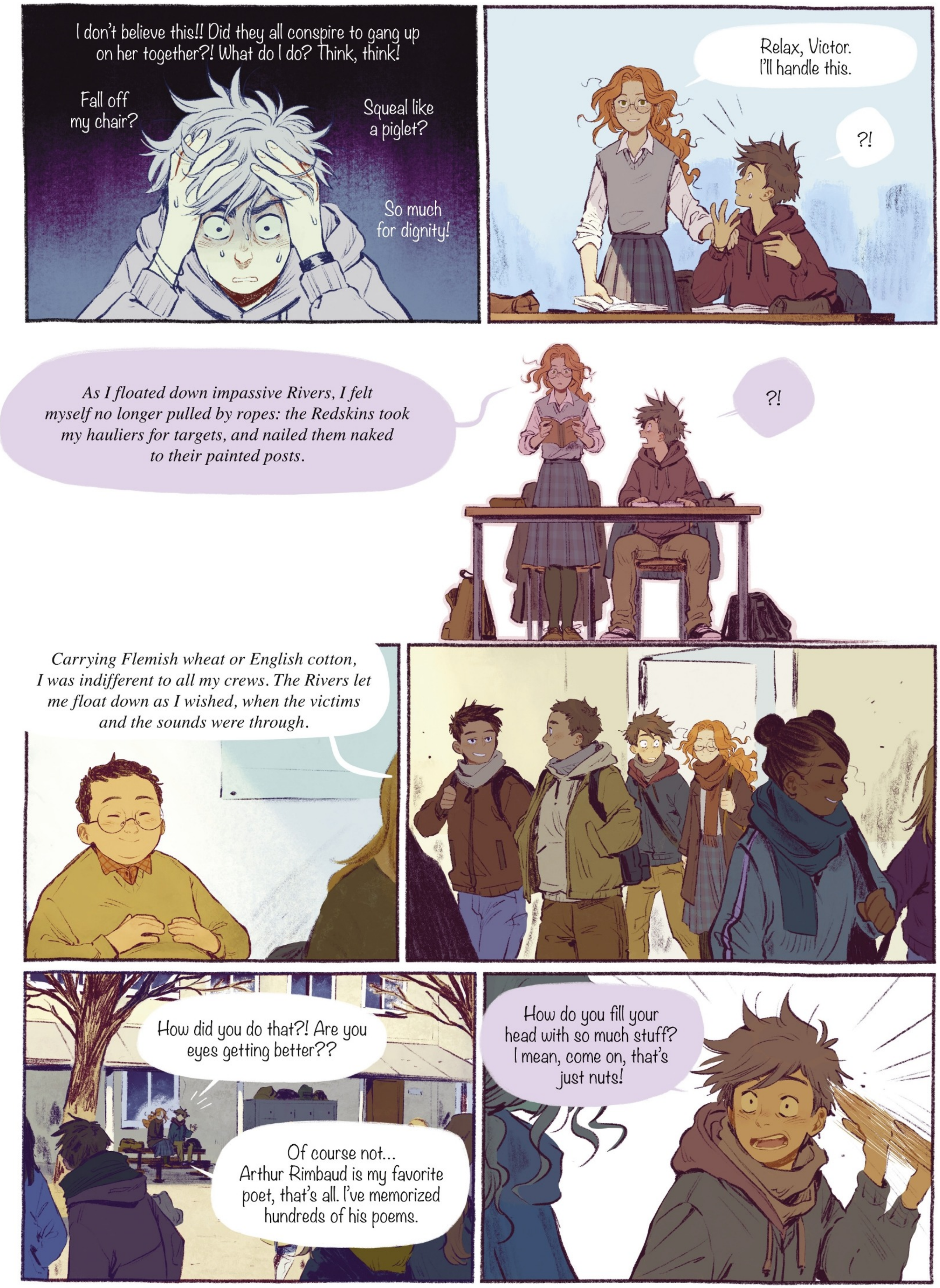
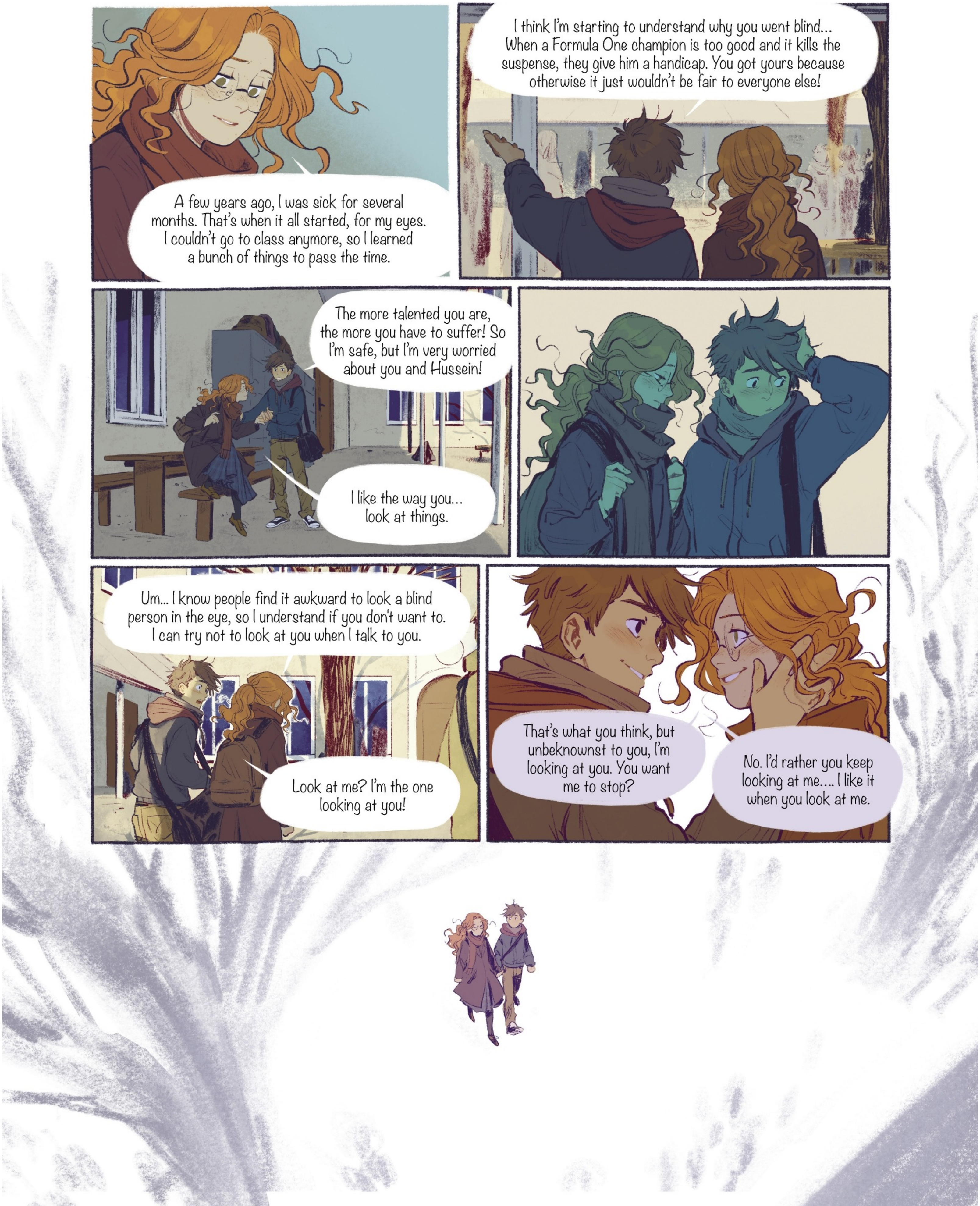
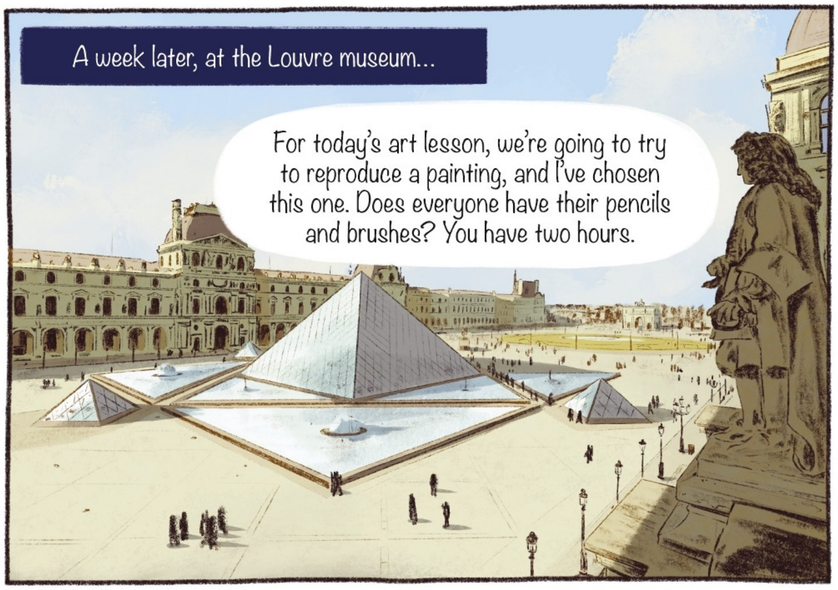


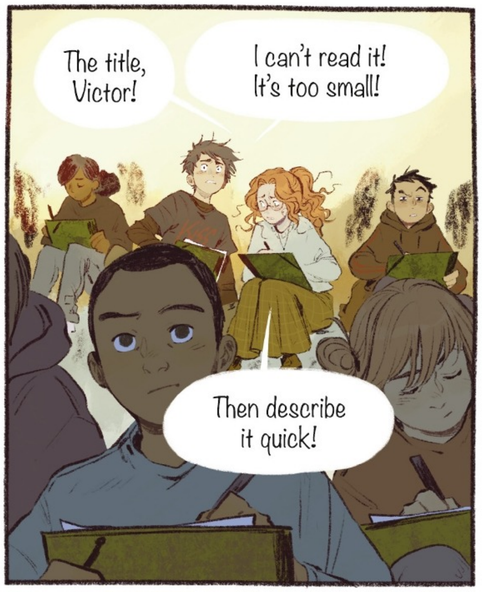
TABLE 29 STEPS
FRONT LOGE OFFICE 55 STEPS
BENCH 47 STEPS
ENTRANCE 49 STEPS
CAFETERIA 39 STEPS
GIRL'S RESTROOM
KNOCK! KNOCK!
Come in!
Sorry I'm late, ma'am.
That's okay, Marie-Jo. Hurry up and take a seat. I've passed out the exercise.

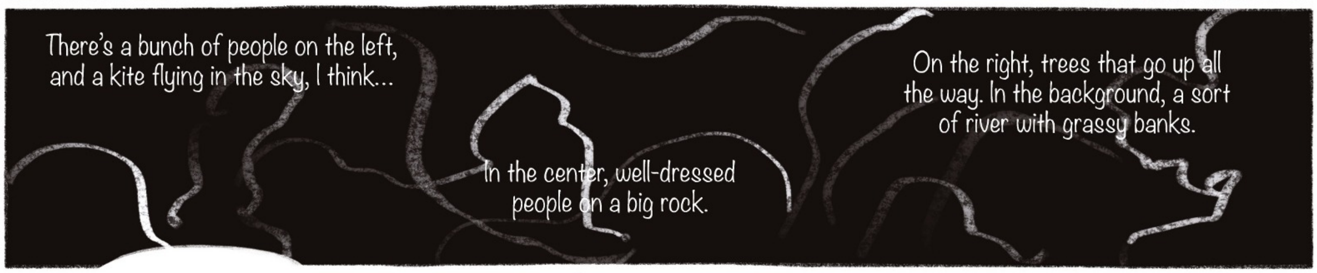

Victor... What are the instructions?
Simplify and solve 3 (x-1) + (x + 2x + 3) = 70
Okay. You do yours.
A few minutes later...
Would anyone like to share their answers with the class? Marie-Jo?
Um... sure!
SIMPLIFY AND
Quick, hand me your copy!
Victor! Let's look.
Here you go, ma'am. My handwriting is terrible, but I think it's right!
Hmm... Yes, you got it right. But why so sloppy?
Um... Pure passion for math, ma'am! The fury, the instinct! The same phenomenon has been observed in poetry and music!
If you say so...
Your turn, Marie-Jo.
Well, the value of X is 5, and I started by combining...
Later, in French class...
We'll be studying poetry until the end of the year, starting with what is probably Arthur Rimbaud's most famous poem: "The Drunken Boat." Marie-Jo, will you read it for us?

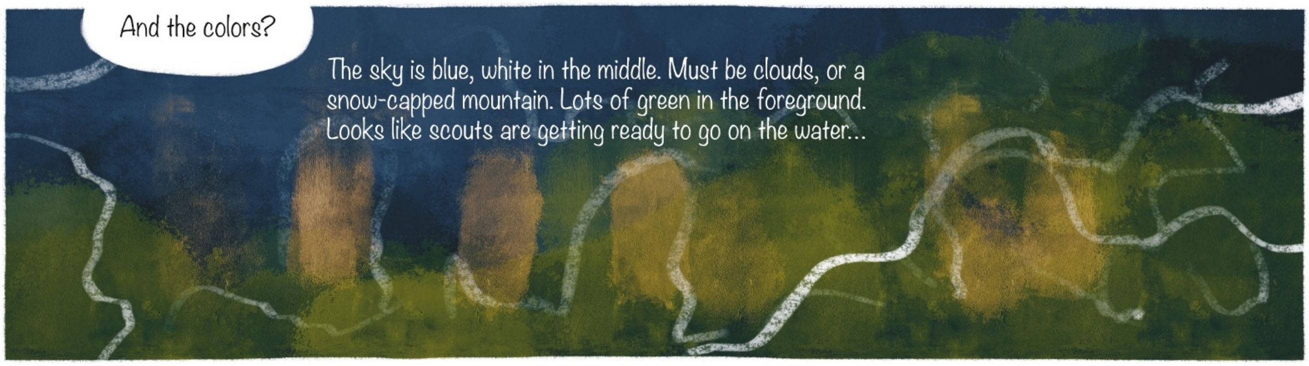

I don't believe this!! Did they all conspire to gang up on her together?! What do I do? Think, think!
Fall off my chair?
Squeal like a piglet?
So much for dignity!
Relax, Victor. I'll handle this.
?!
As I floated down impassive Rivers, I felt myself no longer pulled by ropes: the Redskins took my hauliers for targets, and nailed them naked to their painted posts.
?!
Carrying Flemish wheat or English cotton, I was indifferent to all my crews. The Rivers let me float down as I wished, when the victims and the sounds were through.
How did you do that?! Are you eyes getting better??
Of course not... Arthur Rimbaud is my favorite poet, that's all. I've memorized hundreds of his poems.
How do you fill your head with so much stuff? I mean, come on, that's just nuts!

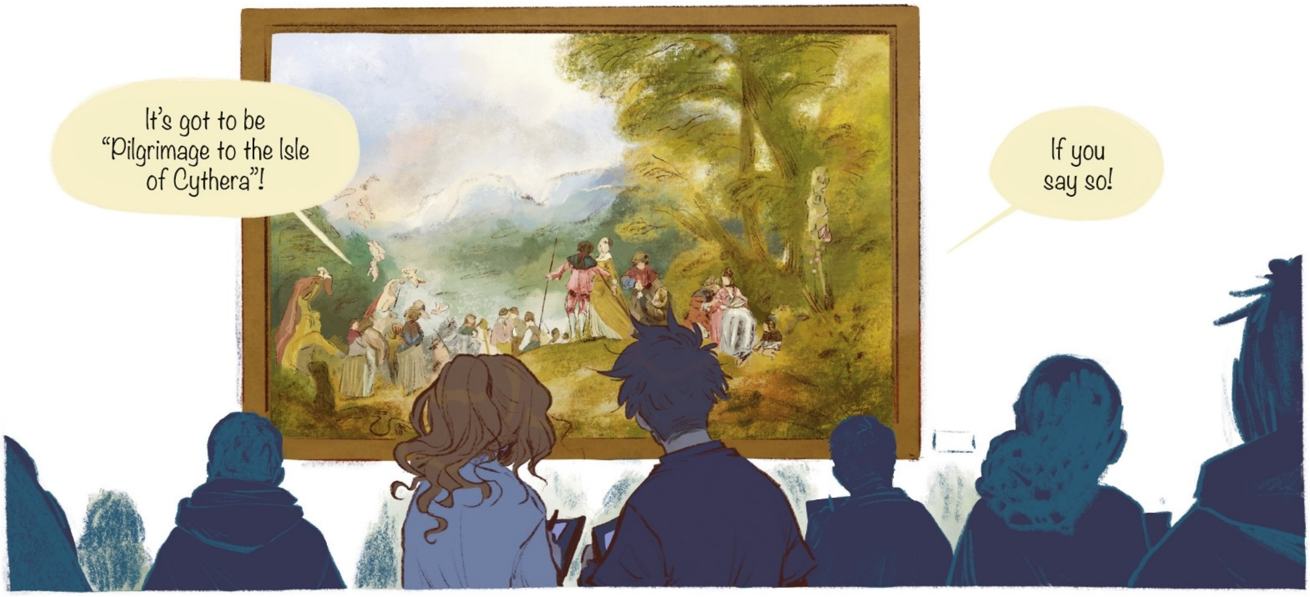

A few years ago, I was sick for several months. That's when it all started, for my eyes. I couldn't go to class anymore, so I learned a bunch of things to pass the time.
I think I'm starting to understand why you went blind… When a Formula One champion is too good and it kills the suspense, they give him a handicap. You got yours because otherwise it just wouldn't be fair to everyone else!
The more talented you are, the more you have to suffer! So I'm safe, but I'm very worried about you and Hussein!
I like the way you… look at things.
Um… I know people find it awkward to look a blind person in the eye, so I understand if you don't want to. I can try not to look at you when I talk to you.
Look at me? I'm the one looking at you!
That's what you think, but unbeknownst to you, I'm looking at you. You want me to stop?
No. I'd rather you keep looking at me…. I like it when you look at me.

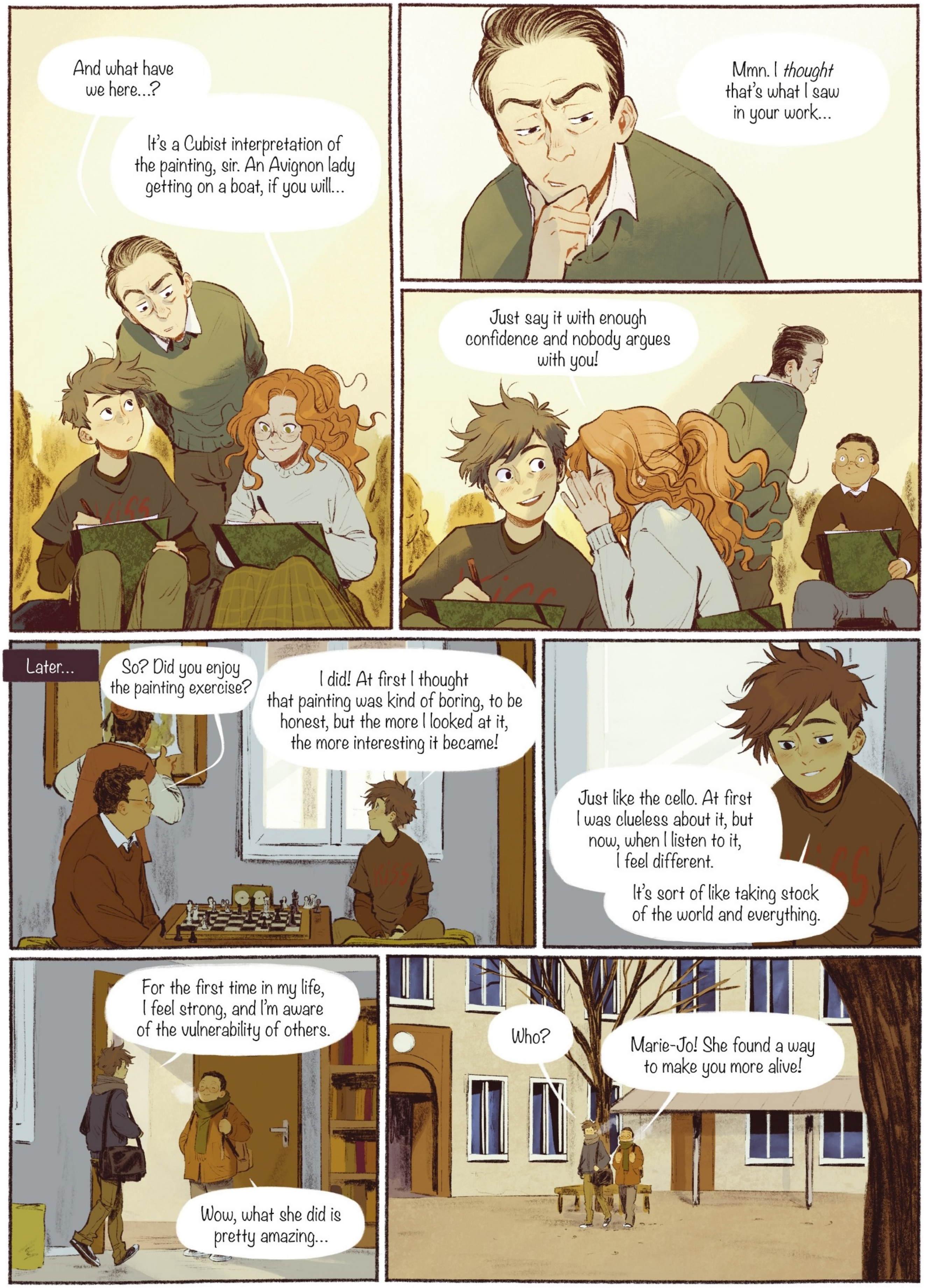

A week later, at the Louvre museum...
For today's art lesson, we're going to try to reproduce a painting, and I've chosen this one. Does everyone have their pencils and brushes? You have two hours.

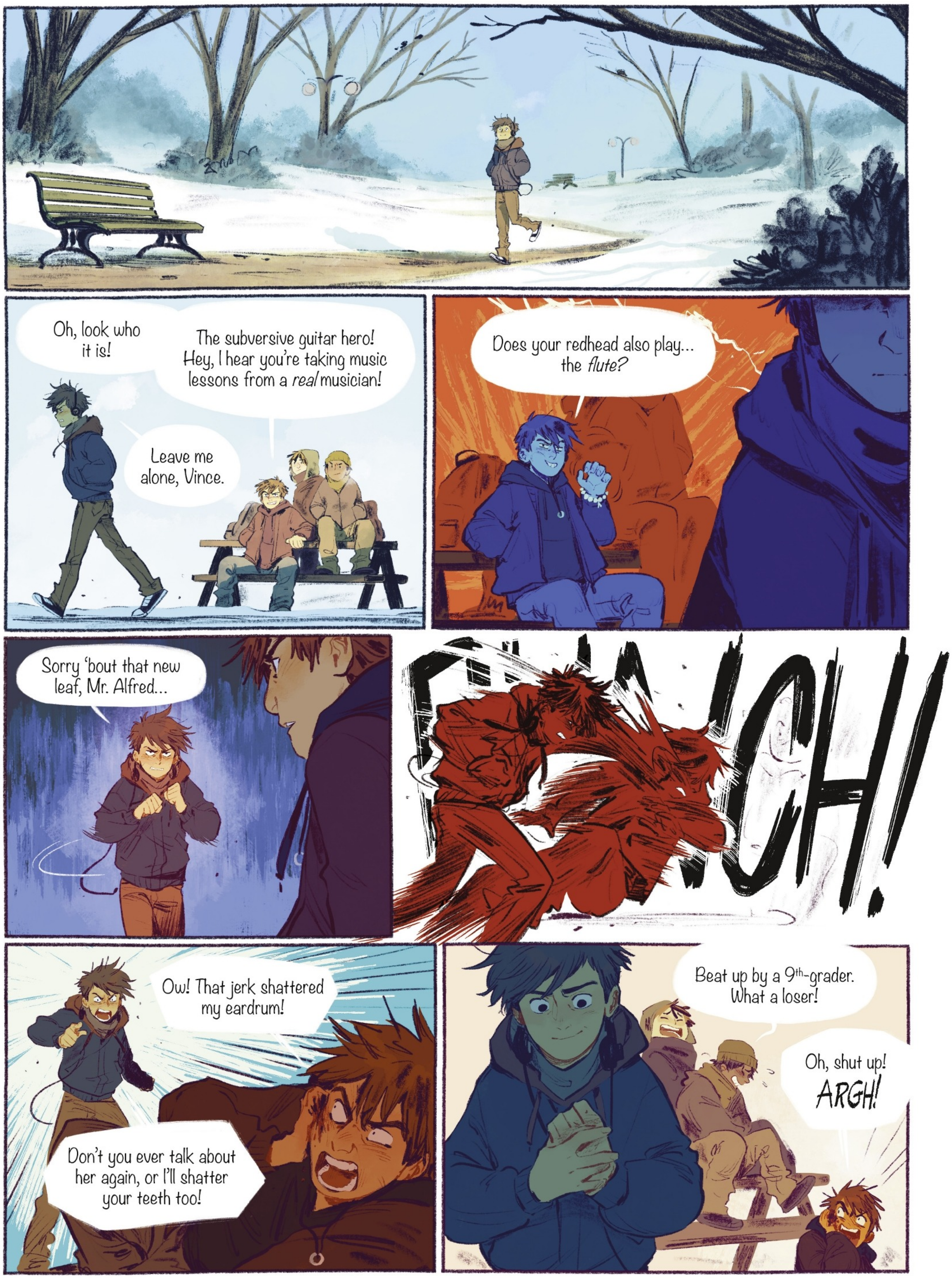

The title, Victor!
I can't read it! It's too small!
Then describe it quick!

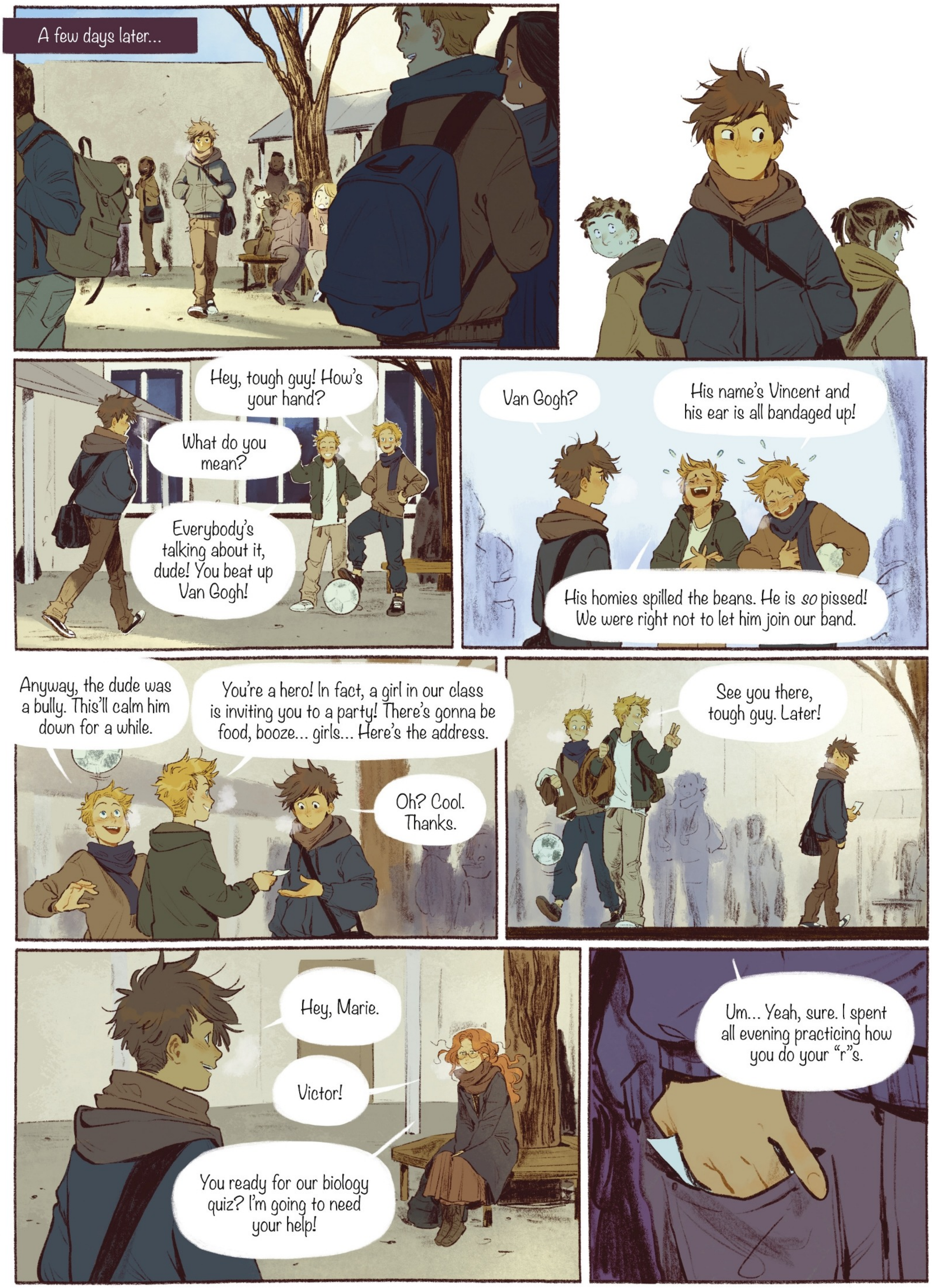

There's a bunch of people on the left, and a kite flying in the sky, I think...
In the center, well-dressed people on a big rock.
On the right, trees that go up all the way. In the background, a sort of river with grassy banks.

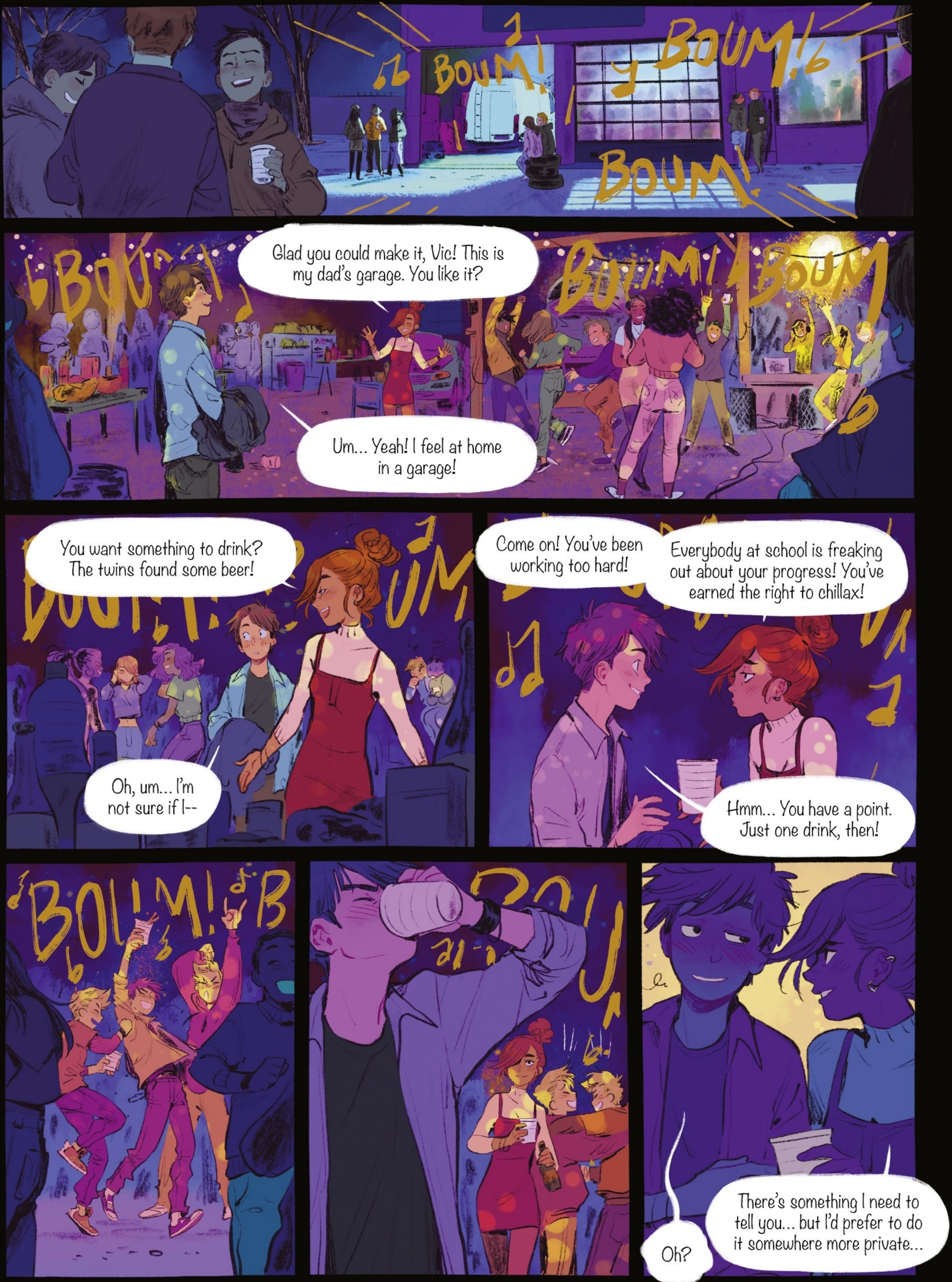

And the colors?
The sky is blue, white in the middle. Must be clouds, or a snow-capped mountain. Lots of green in the foreground. Looks like scouts are getting ready to go on the water...

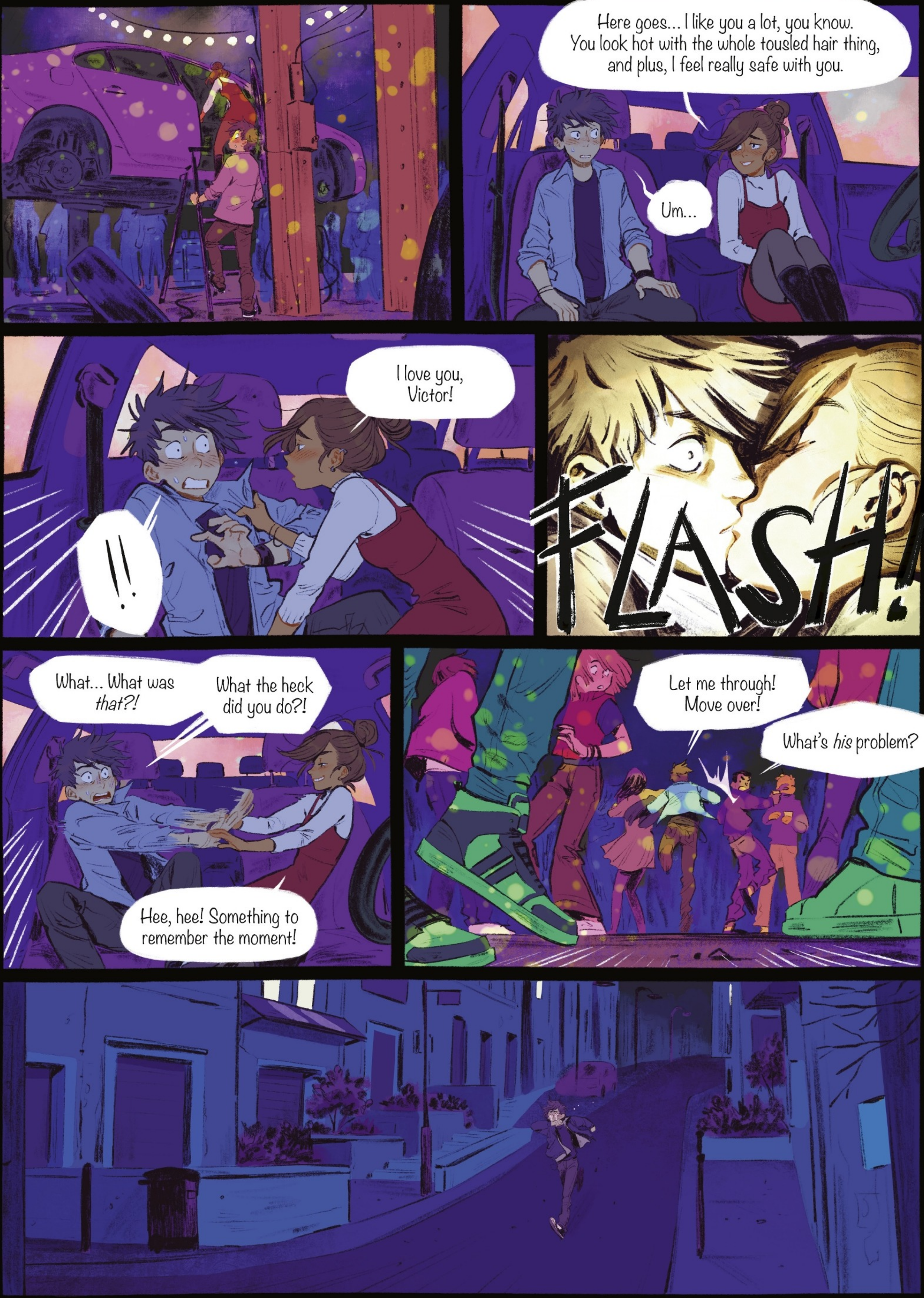

It's got to be "Pilgrimage to the Isle of Cythera"!
If you say so!

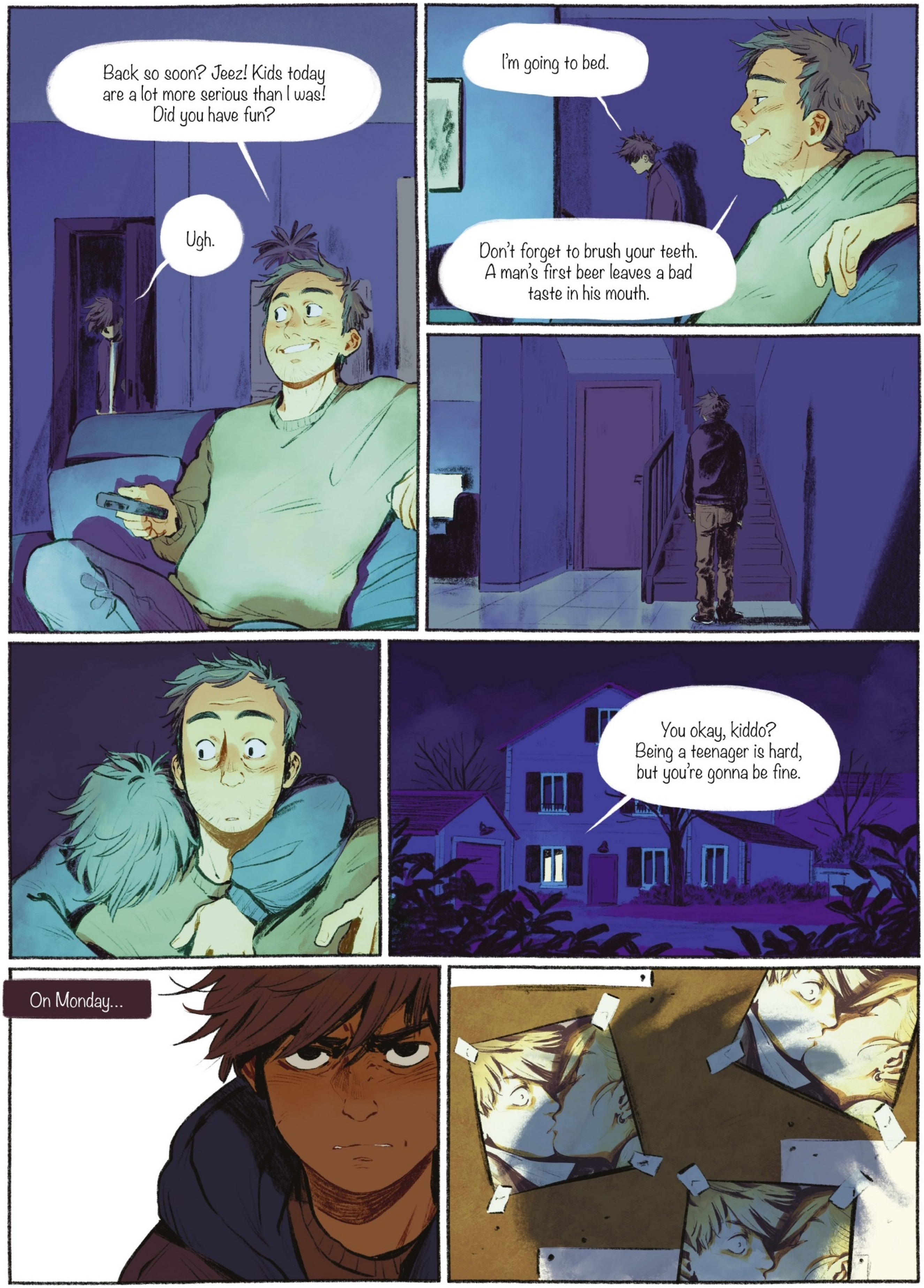

And what have we here...?
It's a Cubist interpretation of the painting, sir. An Avignon lady getting on a boat, if you will...
Mmn. I *thought* that's what I saw in your work...
Just say it with enough confidence and nobody argues with you!
Later...
So? Did you enjoy the painting exercise?
I did! At first I thought that painting was kind of boring, to be honest, but the more I looked at it, the more interesting it became!
Just like the cello. At first I was clueless about it, but now, when I listen to it, I feel different.
It's sort of like taking stock of the world and everything.
For the first time in my life, I feel strong, and I'm aware of the vulnerability of others.
Wow, what she did is pretty amazing...
Who?
Marie-Jo! She found a way to make you more alive!

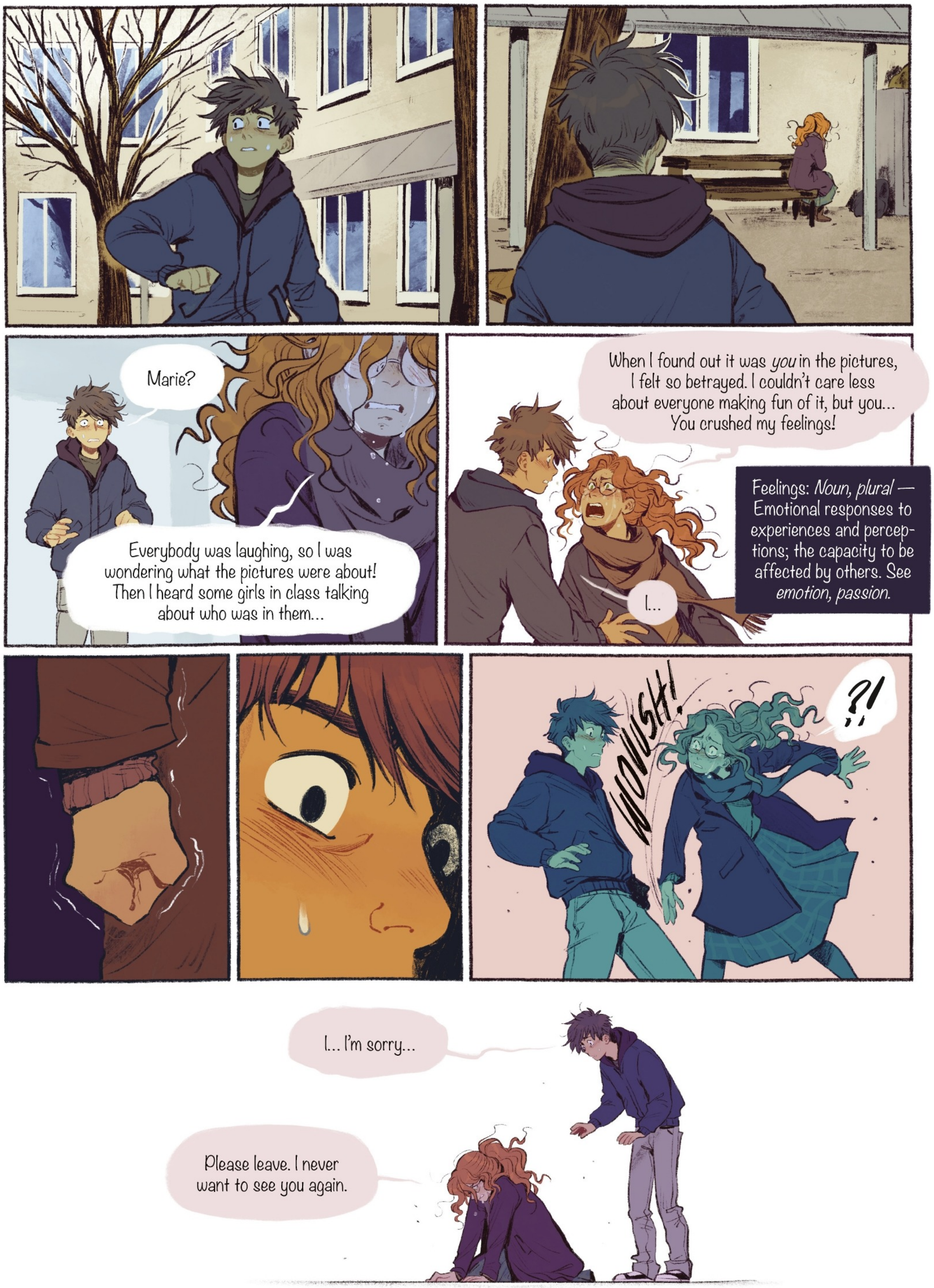

Oh, look who it is!
The subversive guitar hero! Hey, I hear you're taking music lessons from a *real* musician!
Leave me alone, Vince.
Does your redhead also play… the *flute?*
Sorry 'bout that new leaf, Mr. Alfred…
CH!
Ow! That jerk shattered my eardrum!
Don't you ever talk about her again, or I'll shatter your teeth too!
Beat up by a 9th-grader. What a loser!
Oh, shut up! ARGH!

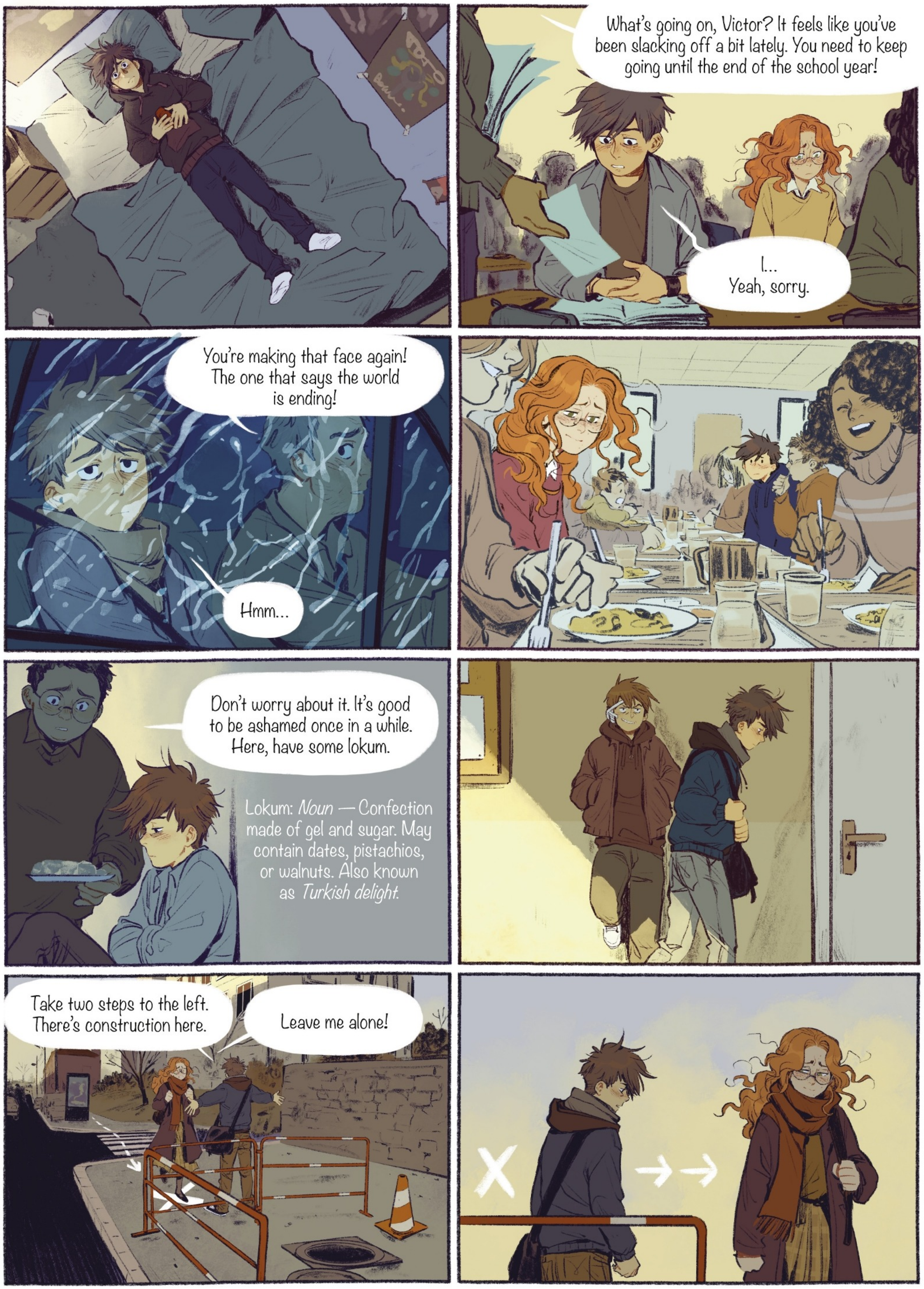

A few days later…
Hey, tough guy! How’s your hand?
What do you mean?
Everybody’s talking about it, dude! You beat up Van Gogh!
Van Gogh?
His name’s Vincent and his ear is all bandaged up!
His homies spilled the beans. He is *so* pissed! We were right not to let him join our band.
Anyway, the dude was a bully. This’ll calm him down for a while.
You’re a hero! In fact, a girl in our class is inviting you to a party! There’s gonna be food, booze… girls… Here’s the address.
Oh? Cool. Thanks.
See you there, tough guy. Later!
Hey, Marie.
Victor!
You ready for our biology quiz? I’m going to need your help!
Um… Yeah, sure. I spent all evening practicing how you do your “r”s.

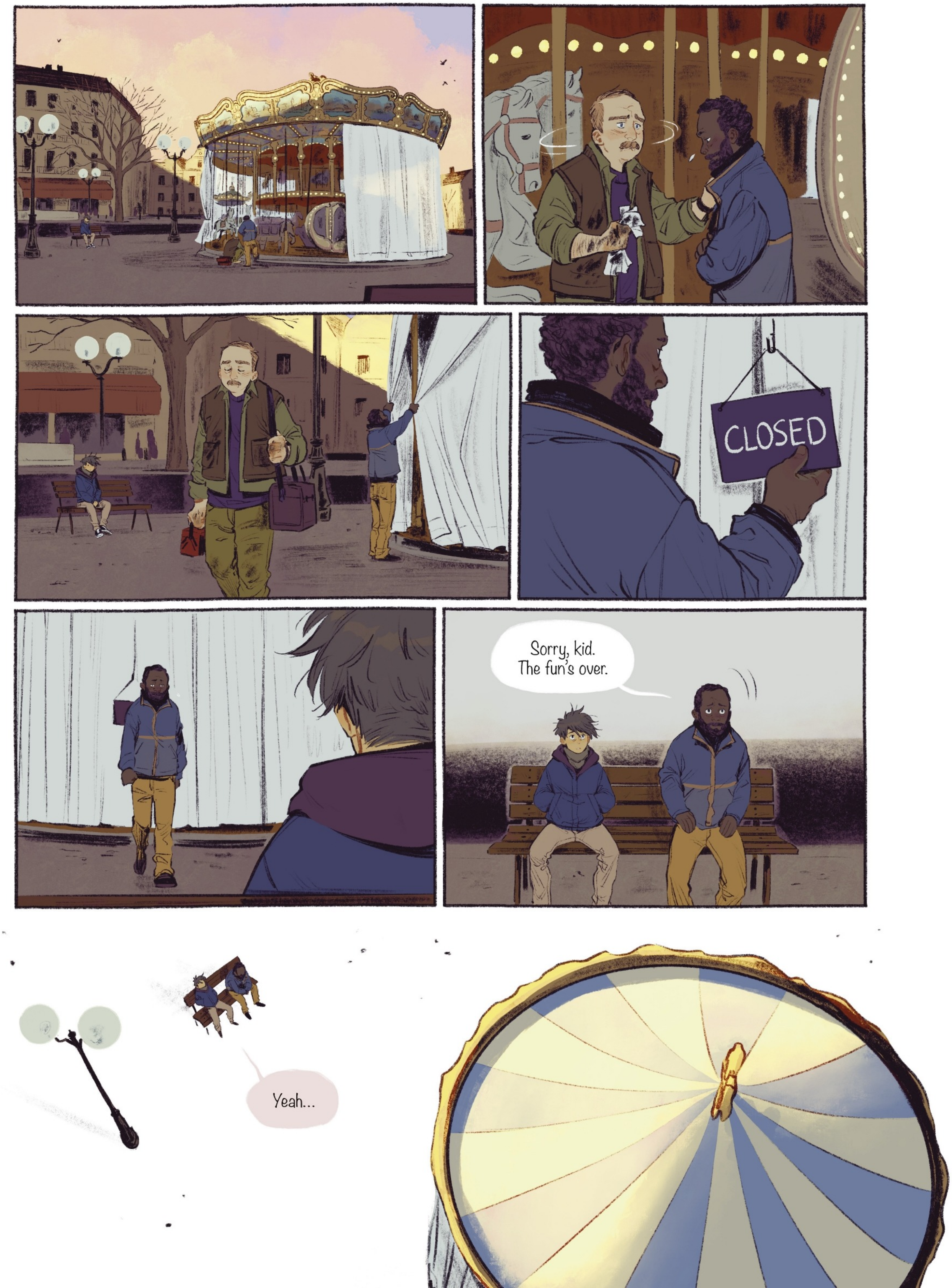

BOUM!
BOUM!
BOUM!
BOU
Glad you could make it, Vic! This is my dad's garage. You like it?
BOUM! BOUM
Um... Yeah! I feel at home in a garage!
You want something to drink? The twins found some beer!
Oh, um... I'm not sure if I--
Come on! You've been working too hard!
Everybody at school is freaking out about your progress! You've earned the right to chillax!
Hmm... You have a point. Just one drink, then!
BOUM! B
There's something I need to tell you... but I'd prefer to do it somewhere more private...
Oh?

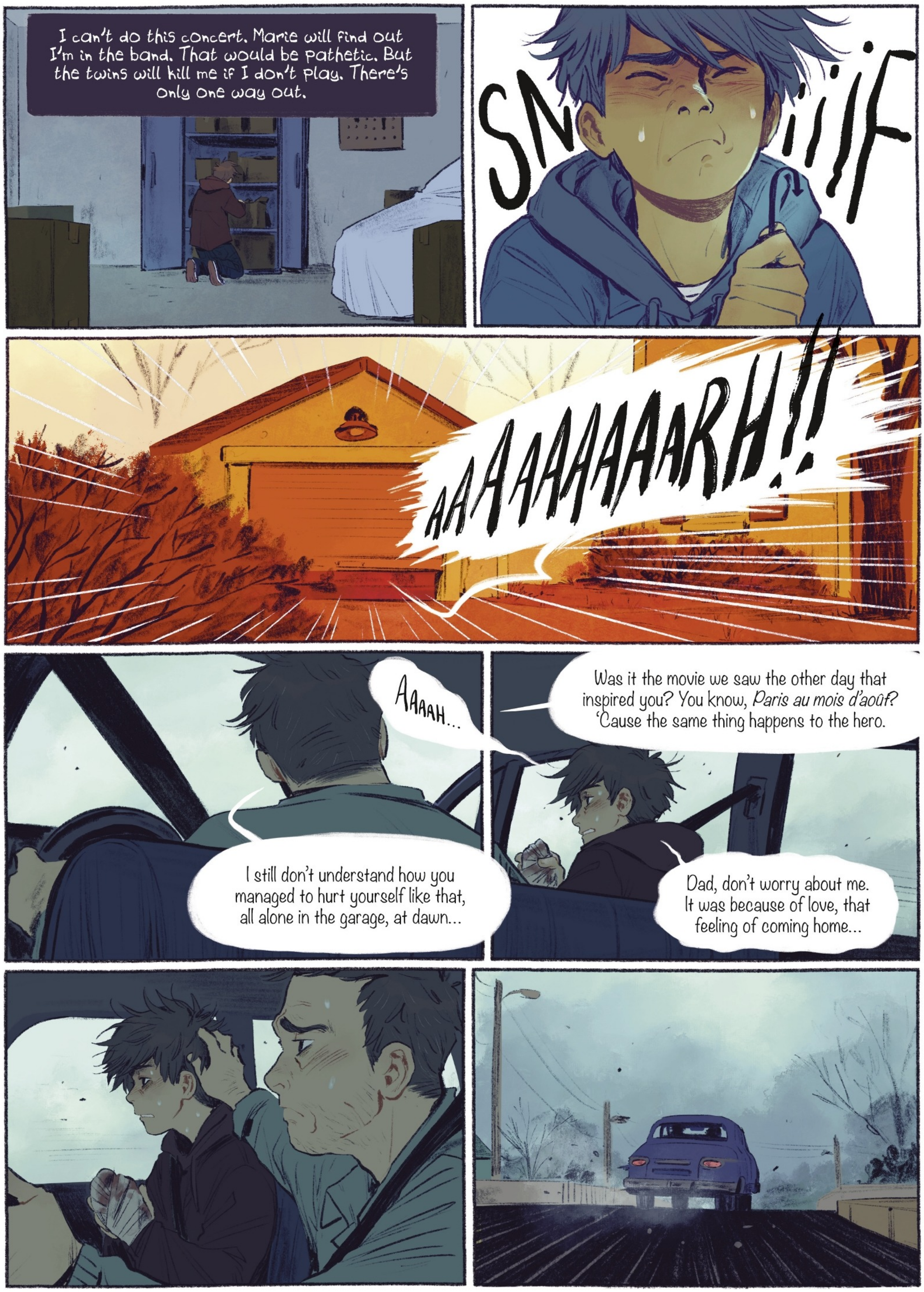

Here goes... I like you a lot, you know. You look hot with the whole tousled hair thing, and plus, I feel really safe with you.
Um...
I love you, Victor!
!!
FLASH!
What... What was *that?!*
What the heck did you do?!
Hee, hee! Something to remember the moment!
Let me through! Move over!
What's *his* problem?

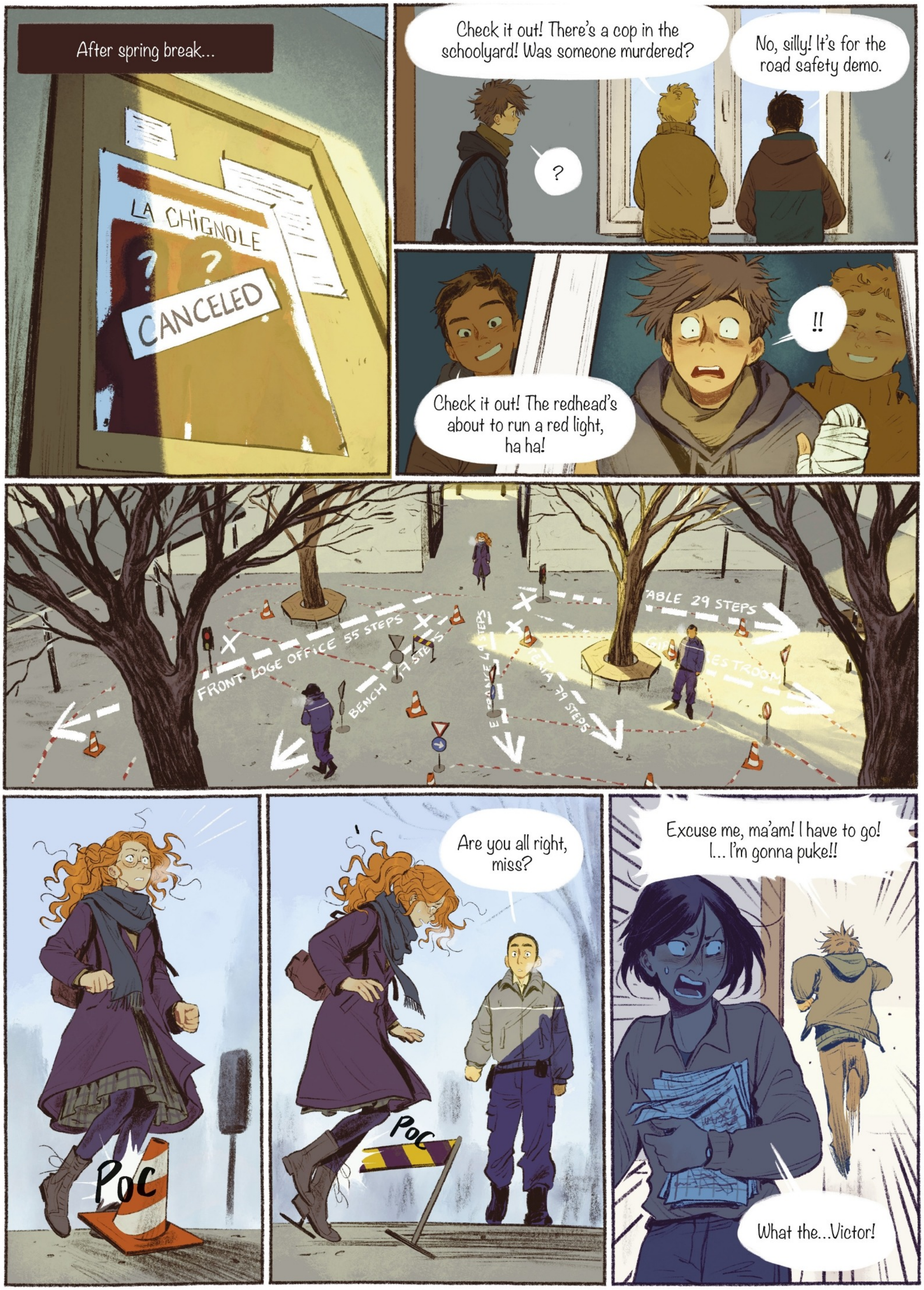

Back so soon? Jeez! Kids today are a lot more serious than I was! Did you have fun?
Ugh.
I'm going to bed.
Don't forget to brush your teeth. A man's first beer leaves a bad taste in his mouth.
You okay, kiddo? Being a teenager is hard, but you're gonna be fine.
On Monday...

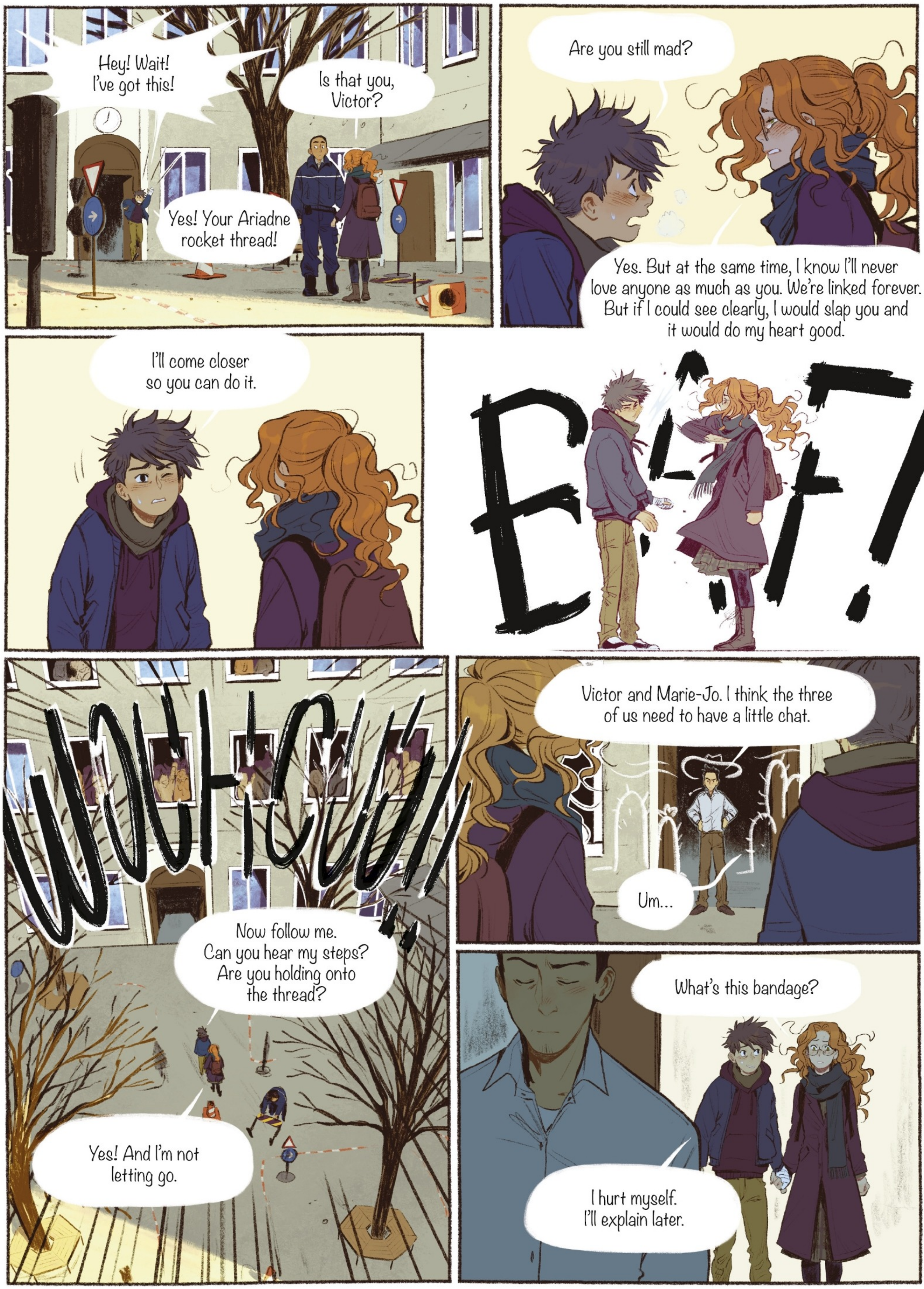

Marie?
Everybody was laughing, so I was wondering what the pictures were about! Then I heard some girls in class talking about who was in them…
When I found out it was *you* in the pictures, I felt so betrayed. I couldn't care less about everyone making fun of it, but you… You crushed my feelings!
I…
Feelings: *Noun, plural* — Emotional responses to experiences and perceptions; the capacity to be affected by others. See *emotion, passion.*
WOUSH!
?!
I… I'm sorry…
Please leave. I never want to see you again.

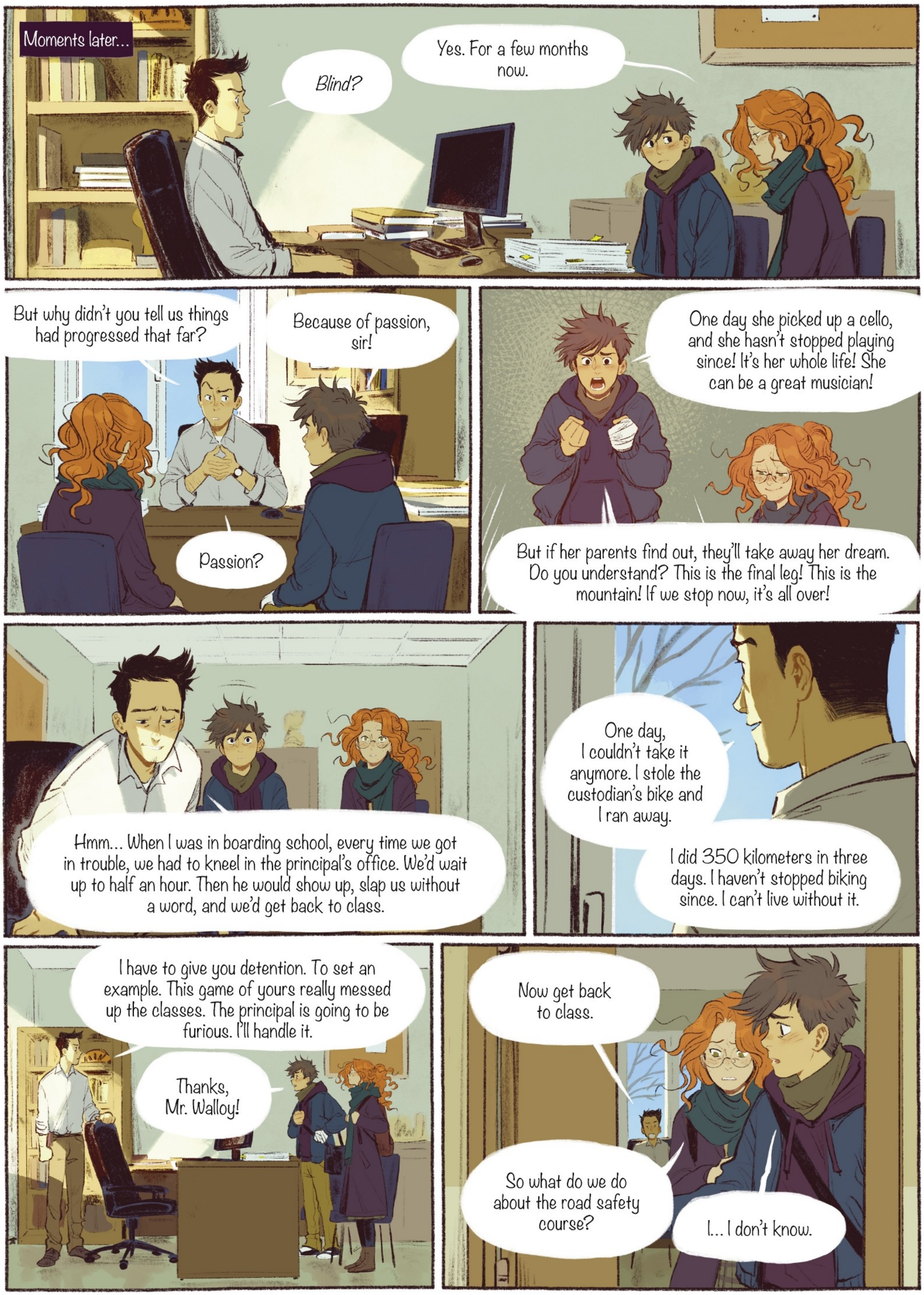

What's going on, Victor? It feels like you've been slacking off a bit lately. You need to keep going until the end of the school year!
I... Yeah, sorry.
You're making that face again! The one that says the world is ending!
Hmm...
Don't worry about it. It's good to be ashamed once in a while. Here, have some lokum.
Lokum: *Noun* — Confection made of gel and sugar. May contain dates, pistachios, or walnuts. Also known as *Turkish delight*.
Take two steps to the left. There's construction here.
Leave me alone!

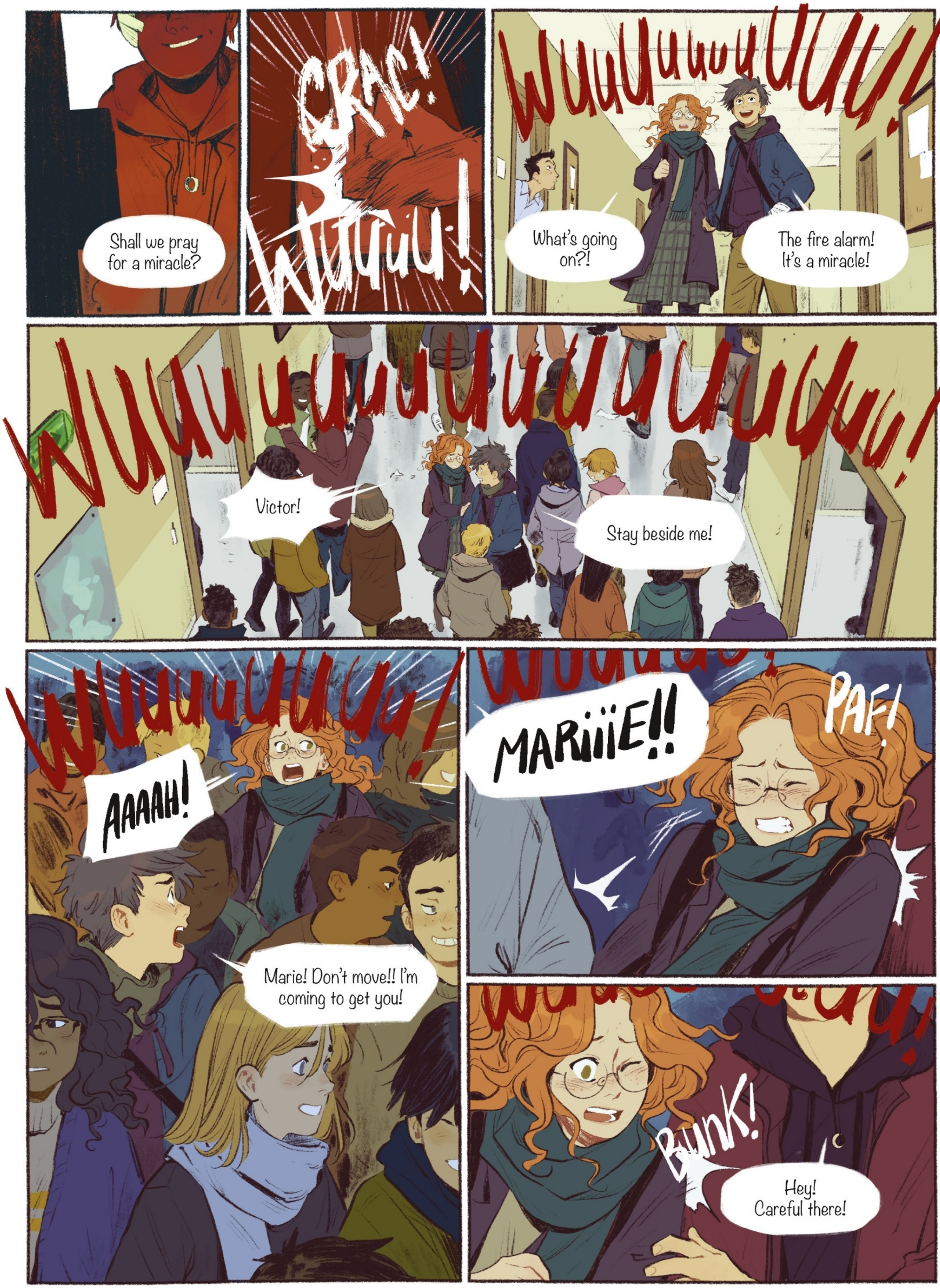

CLOSED
Sorry, kid. The fun's over.
Yeah…

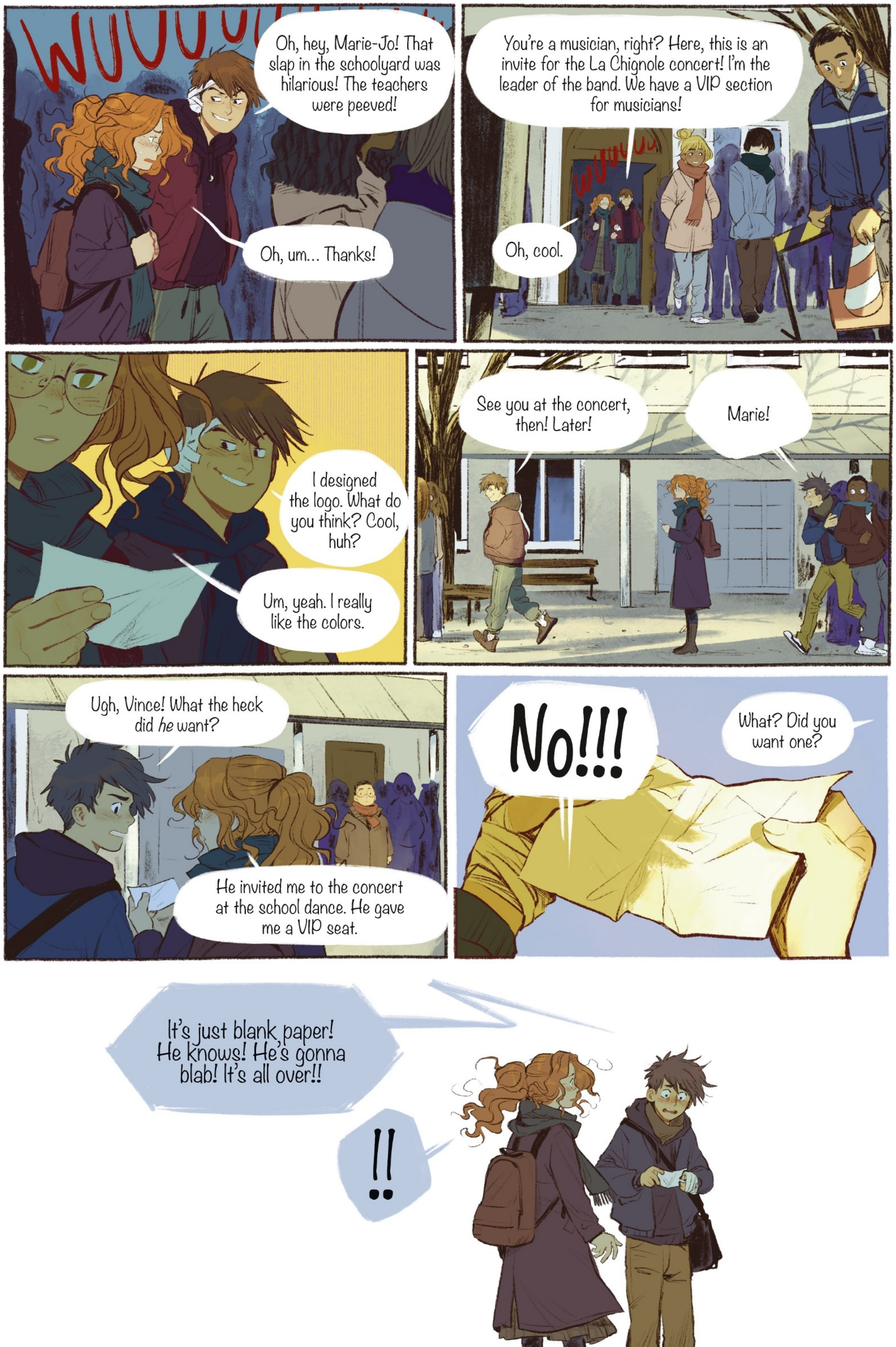

I can't do this concert. Marie will find out I'm in the band. That would be pathetic. But the twins will kill me if I don't play. There's only one way out.
SNIIIF
AAAAAAAAARH!!
AAAAH...
I still don't understand how you managed to hurt yourself like that, all alone in the garage, at dawn...
Was it the movie we saw the other day that inspired you? You know, *Paris au mois d'août*? 'Cause the same thing happens to the hero.
Dad, don't worry about me. It was because of love, that feeling of coming home...

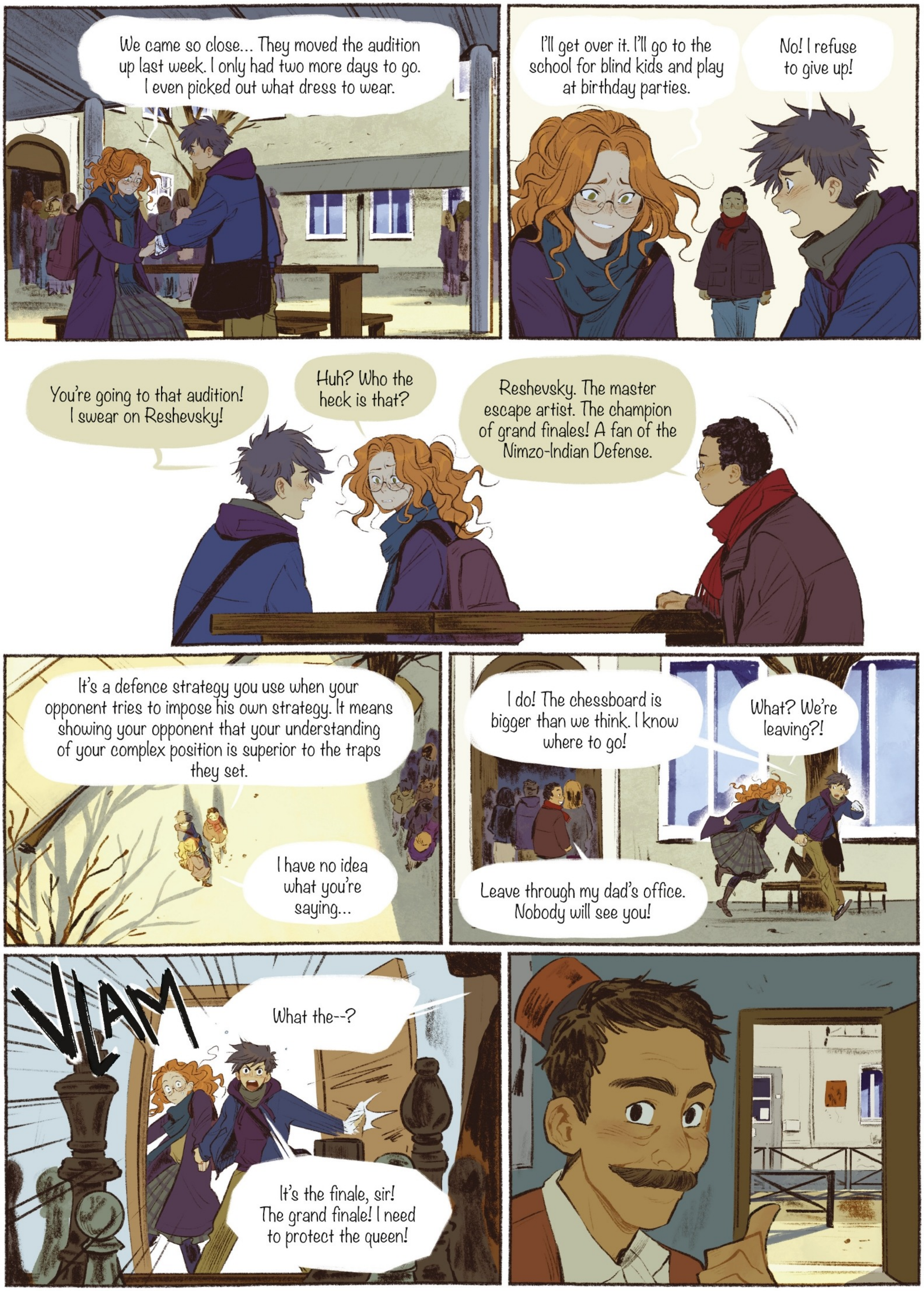

After spring break...
LA CHIGNOLE
? ?
CANCELED
Check it out! There's a cop in the schoolyard! Was someone murdered?
No, silly! It's for the road safety demo.
?
!!
Check it out! The redhead's about to run a red light, ha ha!
ABLE 29 STEPS
FRONT LOGE OFFICE 55 STEPS
BENCH 14 STEPS
49 STEPS
TERIA 34 STEPS
GI RESTROOM
POC
Are you all right, miss?
POC
Excuse me, ma'am! I have to go! I... I'm gonna puke!!
What the...Victor!

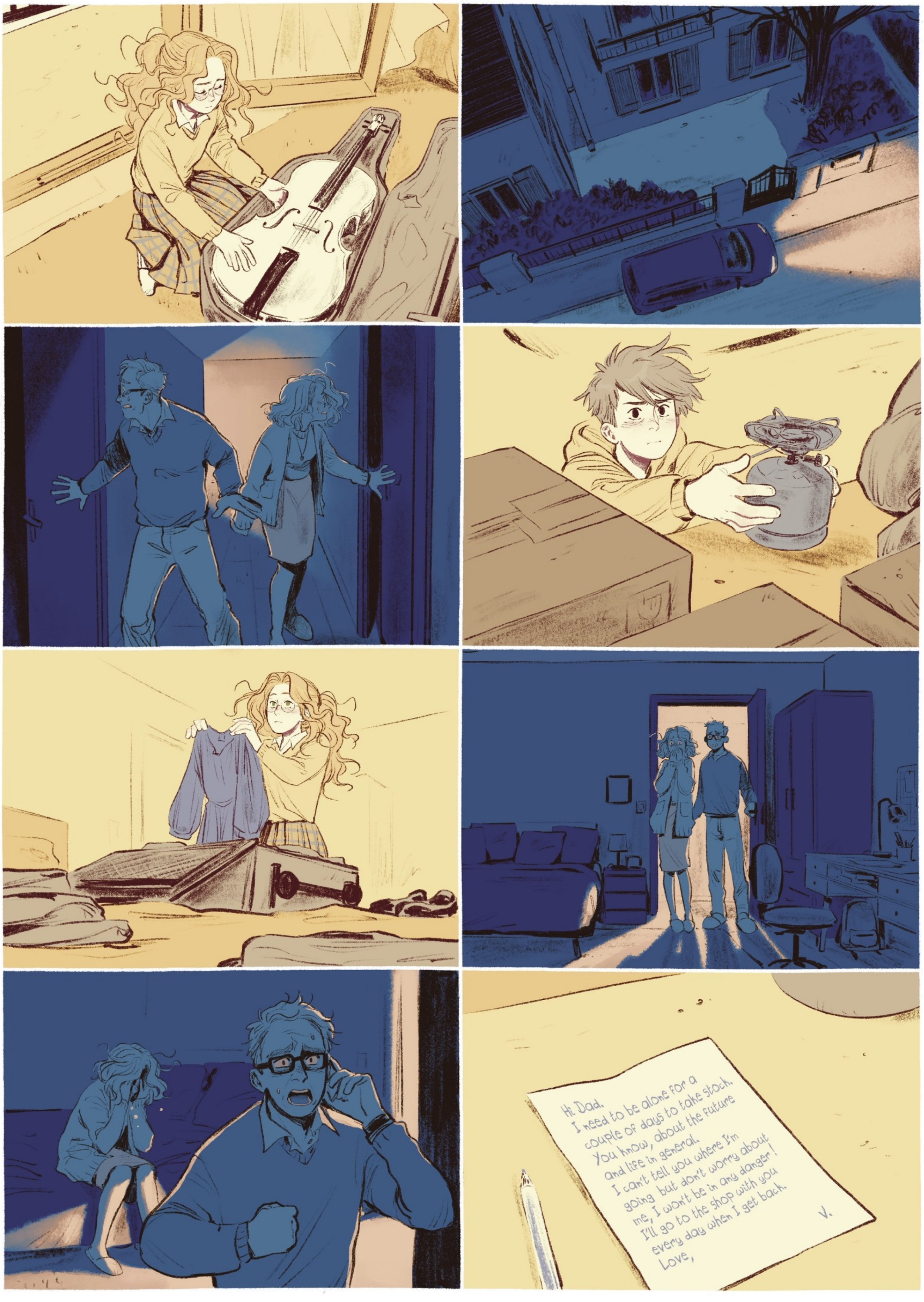

Hey! Wait! I've got this!
Is that you, Victor?
Yes! Your Ariadne rocket thread!
Are you still mad?
Yes. But at the same time, I know I'll never love anyone as much as you. We're linked forever. But if I could see clearly, I would slap you and it would do my heart good.
I'll come closer so you can do it.
BAF!
WOOHOOO!
Now follow me. Can you hear my steps? Are you holding onto the thread?
Yes! And I'm not letting go.
Victor and Marie-Jo. I think the three of us need to have a little chat.
Um...
What's this bandage?
I hurt myself. I'll explain later.


Moments later...
Blind?
Yes. For a few months now.
But why didn't you tell us things had progressed that far?
Because of passion, sir!
Passion?
One day she picked up a cello, and she hasn't stopped playing since! It's her whole life! She can be a great musician!
But if her parents find out, they'll take away her dream. Do you understand? This is the final leg! This is the mountain! If we stop now, it's all over!
Hmm... When I was in boarding school, every time we got in trouble, we had to kneel in the principal's office. We'd wait up to half an hour. Then he would show up, slap us without a word, and we'd get back to class.
One day, I couldn't take it anymore. I stole the custodian's bike and I ran away.
I did 350 kilometers in three days. I haven't stopped biking since. I can't live without it.
I have to give you detention. To set an example. This game of yours really messed up the classes. The principal is going to be furious. I'll handle it.
Thanks, Mr. Walloy!
Now get back to class.
So what do we do about the road safety course?
I... I don't know.

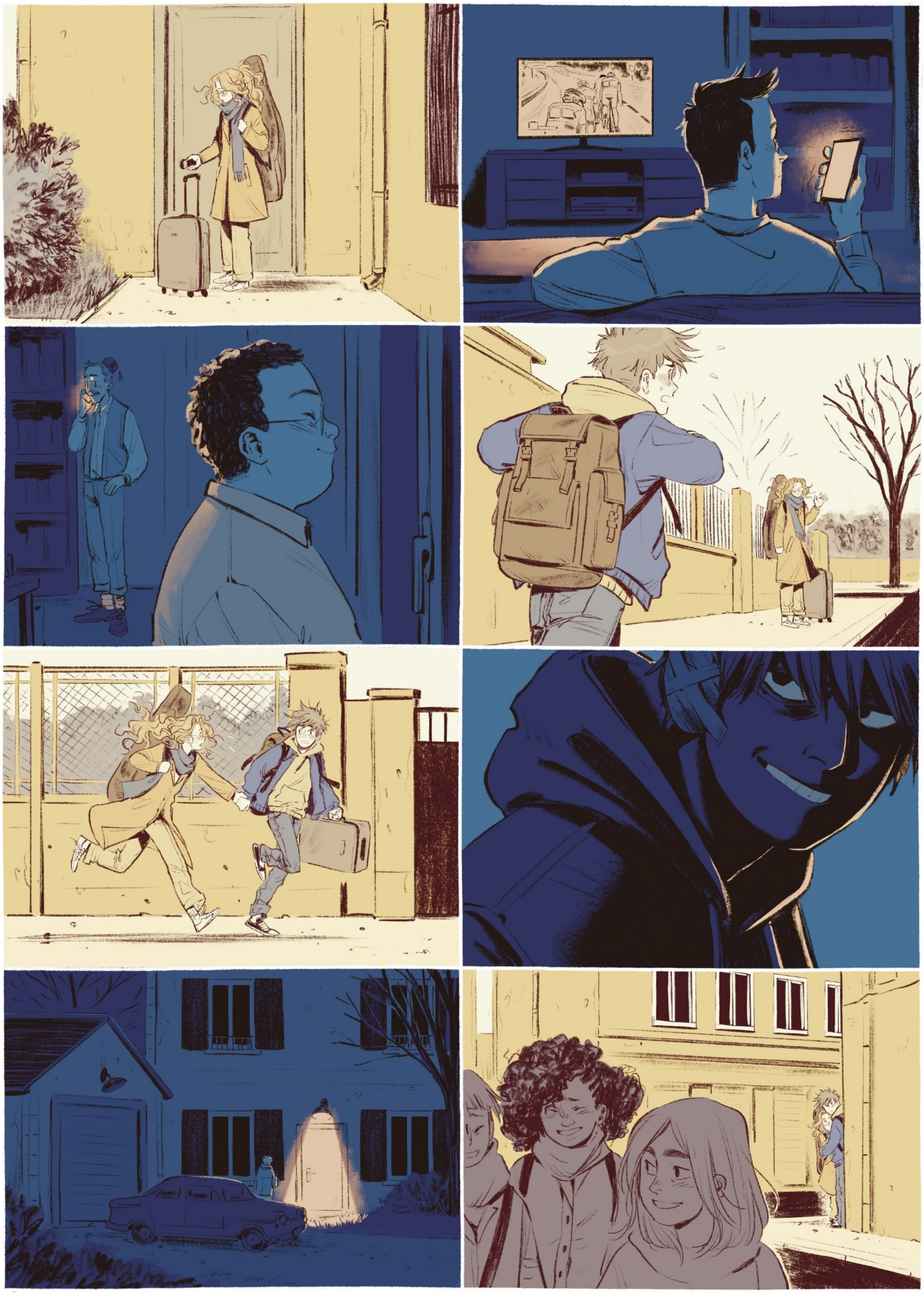

Shall we pray for a miracle?
CRAC!
Wuuuu!
Wuuuuuuuuuuu!
What's going on?!
The fire alarm! It's a miracle!
Wuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuu!
Victor!
Stay beside me!
Wuuuuuuuuu!
AAAAH!
Marie! Don't move!! I'm coming to get you!
MARiiiE!!
PAF!
BUNK!
Hey! Careful there!

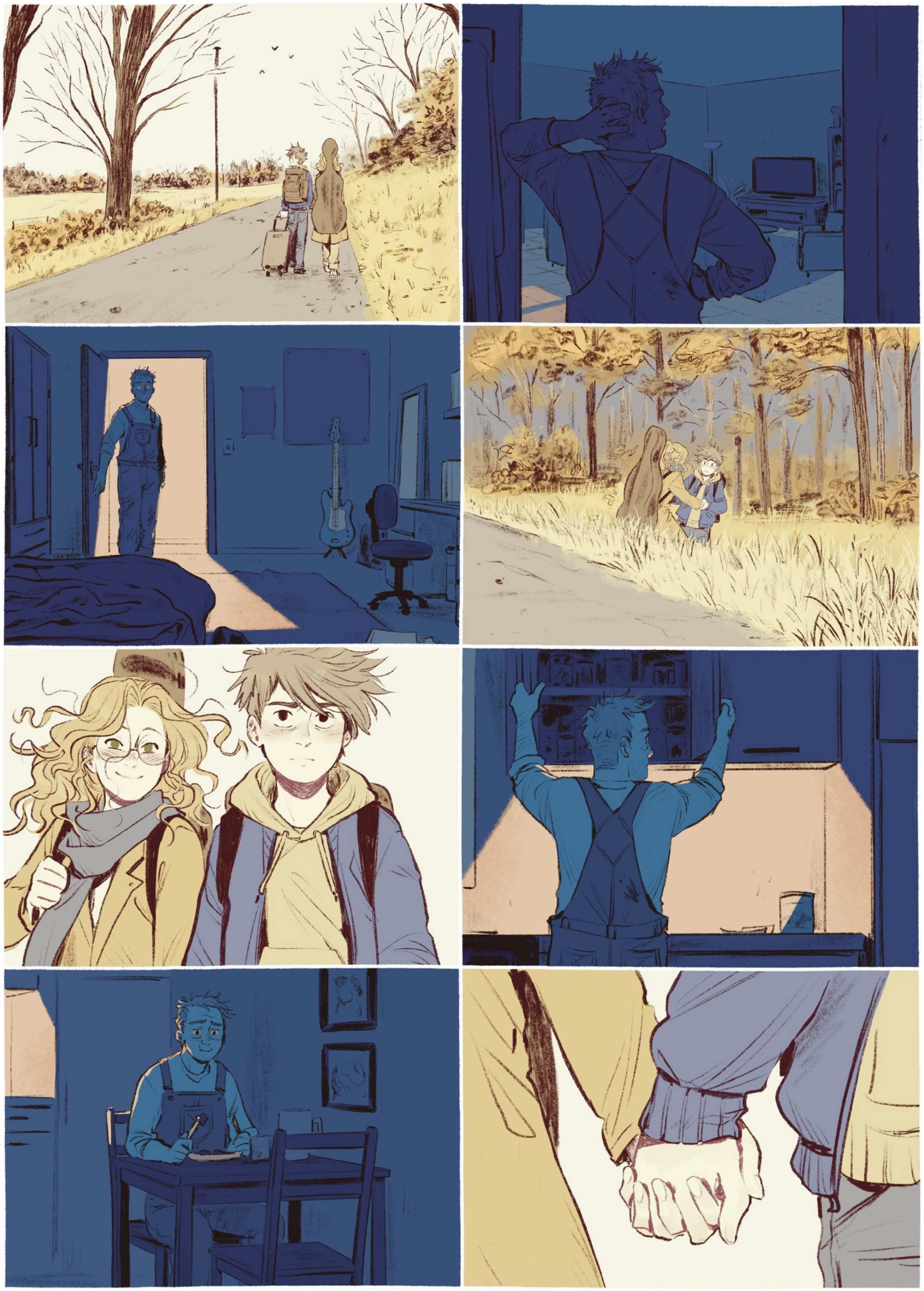

WUUUUU
Oh, hey, Marie-Jo! That slap in the schoolyard was hilarious! The teachers were peeved!
Oh, um… Thanks!
You're a musician, right? Here, this is an invite for the La Chignole concert! I'm the leader of the band. We have a VIP section for musicians!
WUUUU
Oh, cool.
I designed the logo. What do you think? Cool, huh?
Um, yeah. I really like the colors.
See you at the concert, then! Later!
Marie!
Ugh, Vince! What the heck did *he* want?
He invited me to the concert at the school dance. He gave me a VIP seat.
No!!!
What? Did you want one?
It's just blank paper! He knows! He's gonna blab! It's all over!!
!!

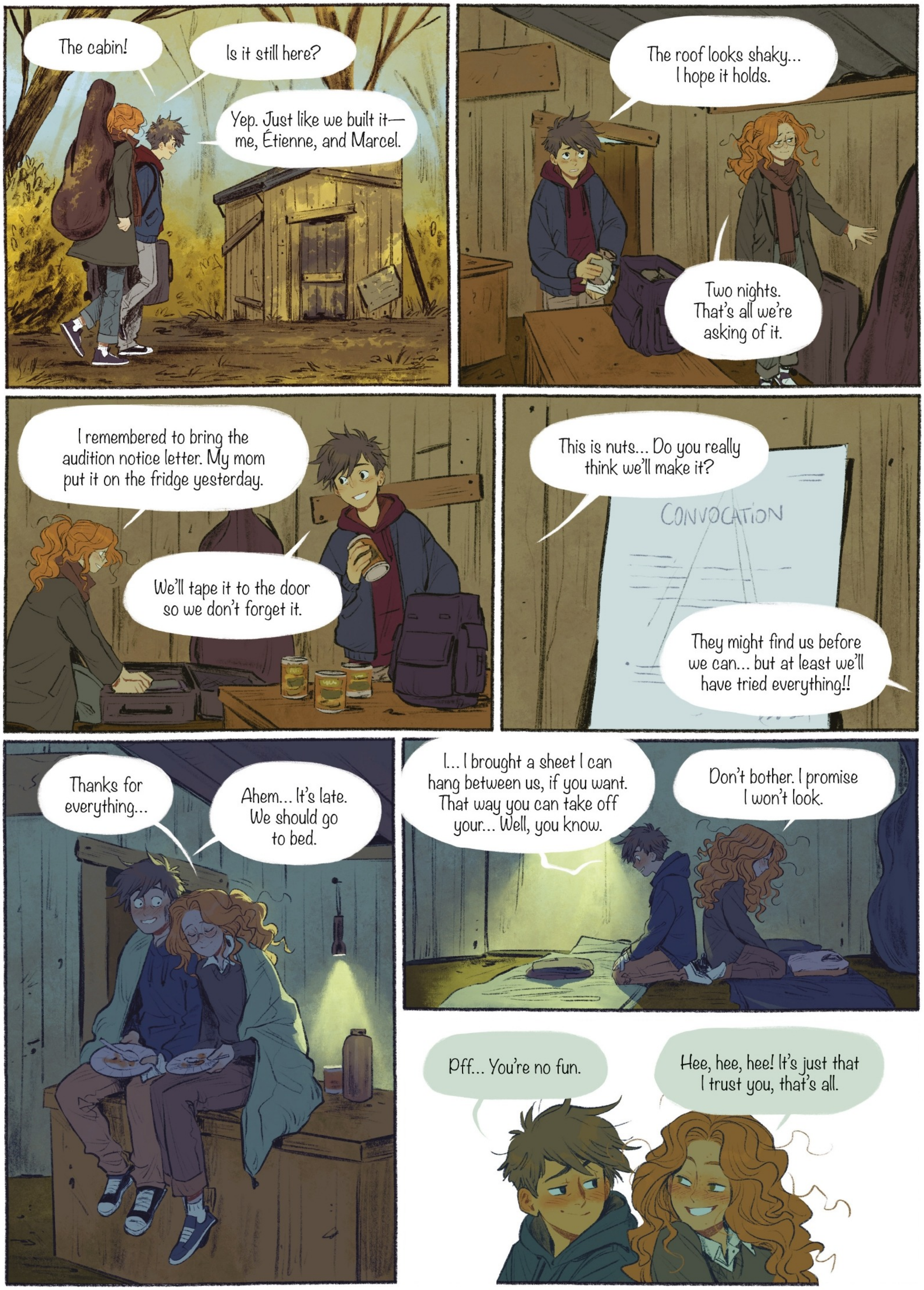

We came so close… They moved the audition up last week. I only had two more days to go. I even picked out what dress to wear.
I'll get over it. I'll go to the school for blind kids and play at birthday parties.
No! I refuse to give up!
You're going to that audition! I swear on Reshevsky!
Huh? Who the heck is that?
Reshevsky. The master escape artist. The champion of grand finales! A fan of the Nimzo-Indian Defense.
It's a defence strategy you use when your opponent tries to impose his own strategy. It means showing your opponent that your understanding of your complex position is superior to the traps they set.
I have no idea what you're saying…
I do! The chessboard is bigger than we think. I know where to go!
What? We're leaving?!
Leave through my dad's office. Nobody will see you!
VLAM
What the--?
It's the finale, sir! The grand finale! I need to protect the queen!

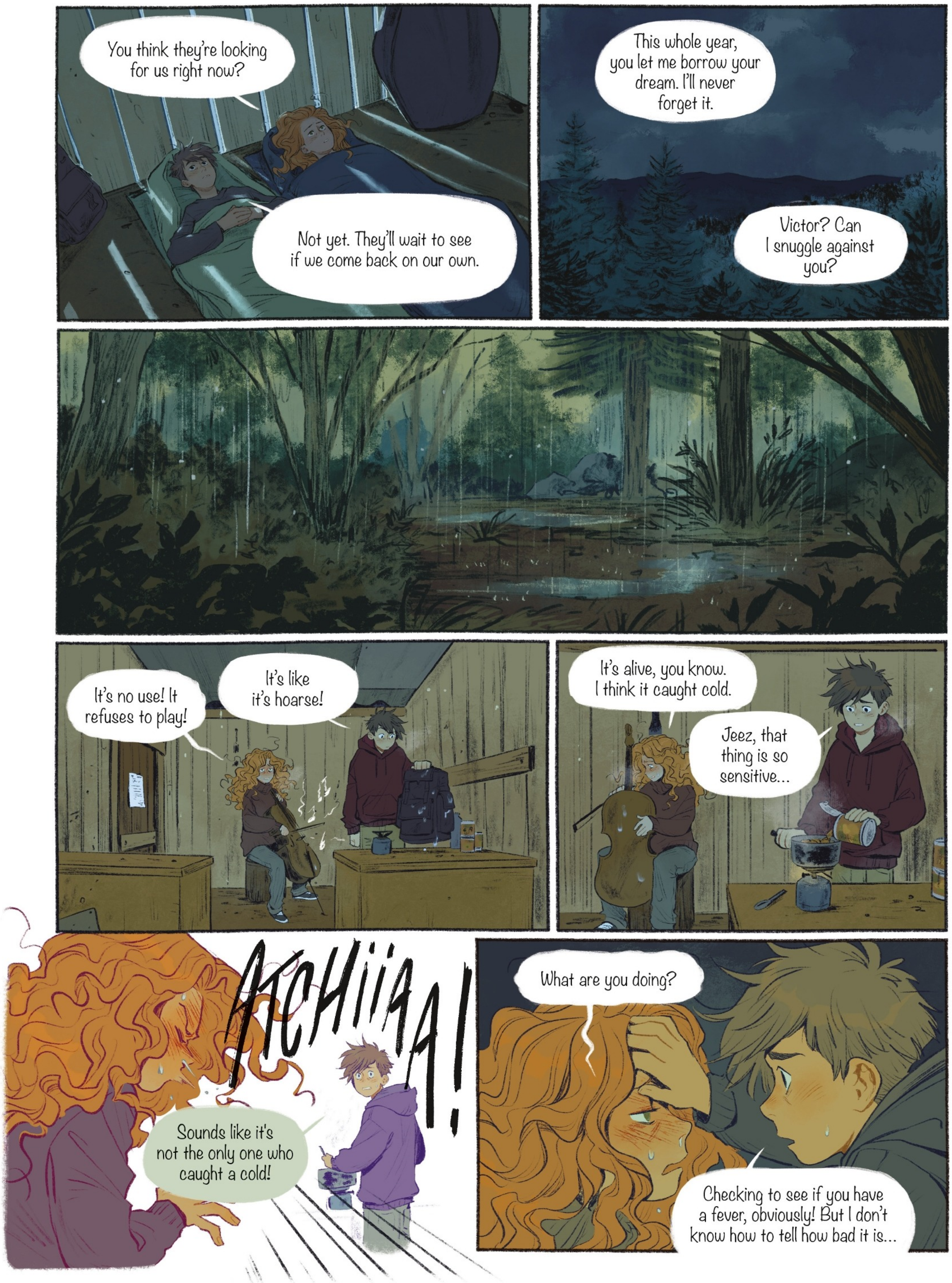


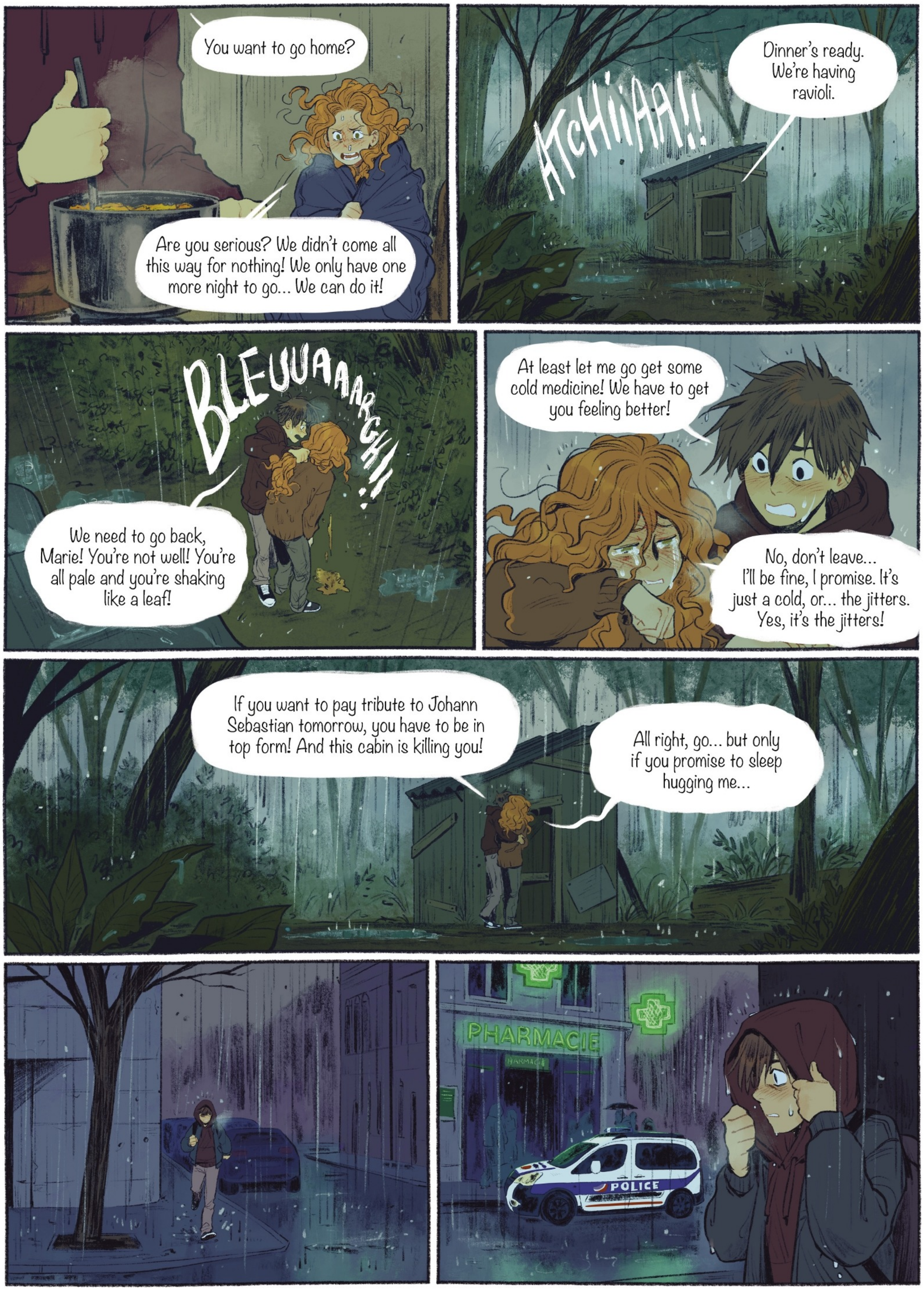
Hi Dad.
I need to be alone for a
couple of days to take stock.
You know, about the future
and life in general.
I can't tell you where I'm
going but don't worry about
me, I won't be in any danger!
I'll go to the shop with you
every day when I get back.
Love,
V.

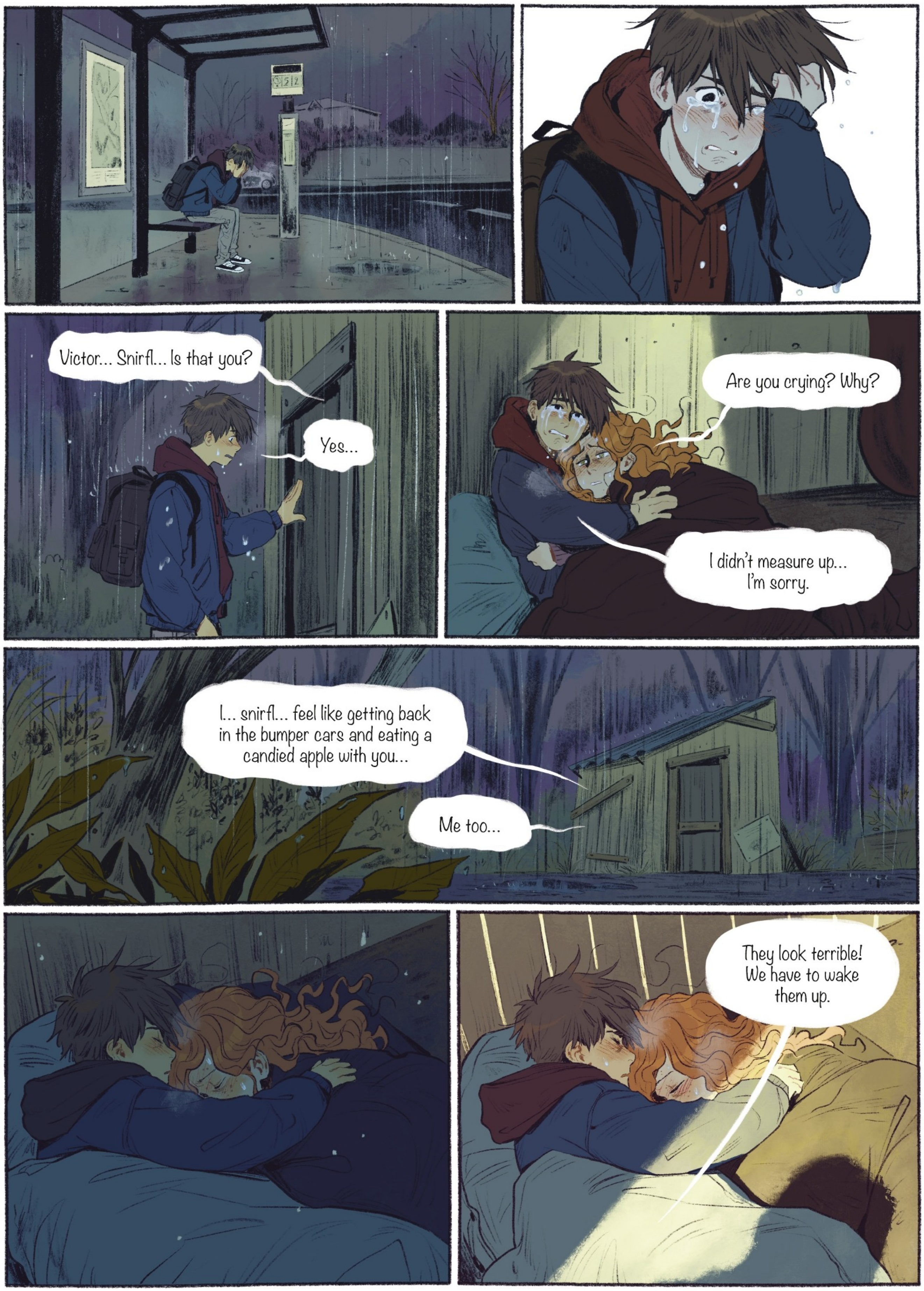


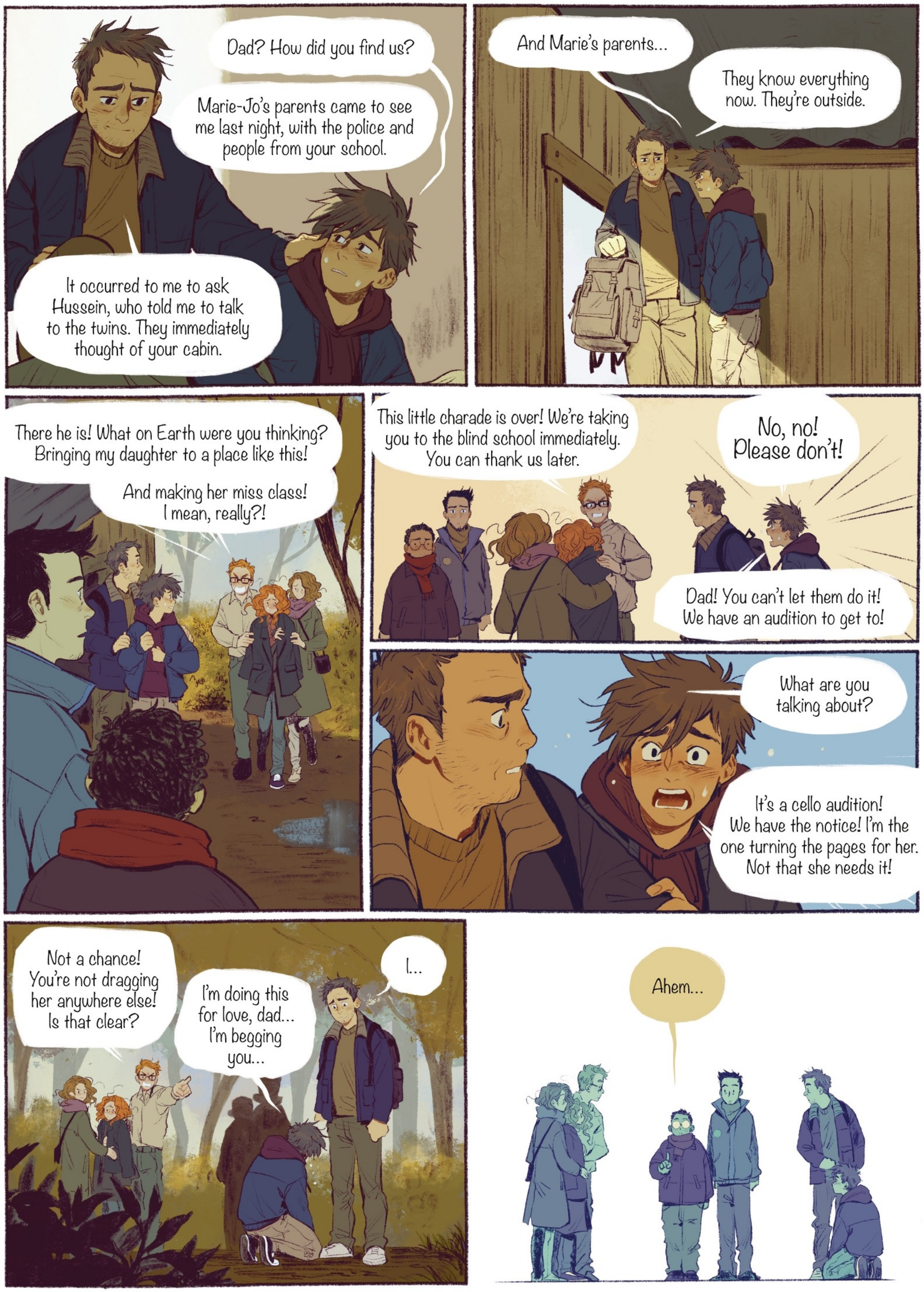


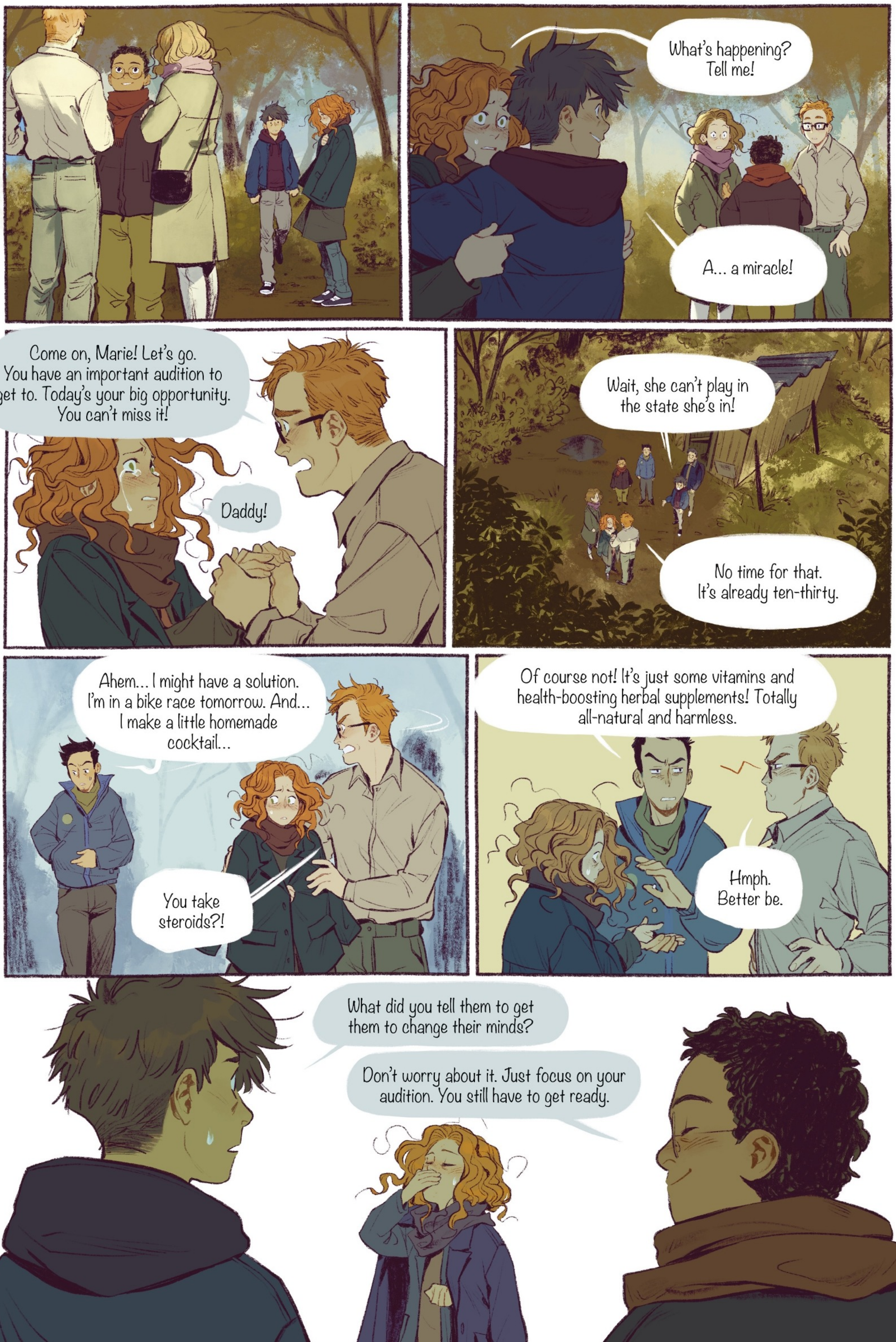

The cabin!
Is it still here?
Yep. Just like we built it— me, Étienne, and Marcel.
The roof looks shaky… I hope it holds.
Two nights. That's all we're asking of it.
I remembered to bring the audition notice letter. My mom put it on the fridge yesterday.
We'll tape it to the door so we don't forget it.
This is nuts… Do you really think we'll make it?
CONVOCATION
They might find us before we can… but at least we'll have tried everything!!
Thanks for everything…
Ahem… It's late. We should go to bed.
I… I brought a sheet I can hang between us, if you want. That way you can take off your… Well, you know.
Don't bother. I promise I won't look.
Pff… You're no fun.
Hee, hee, hee! It's just that I trust you, that's all.

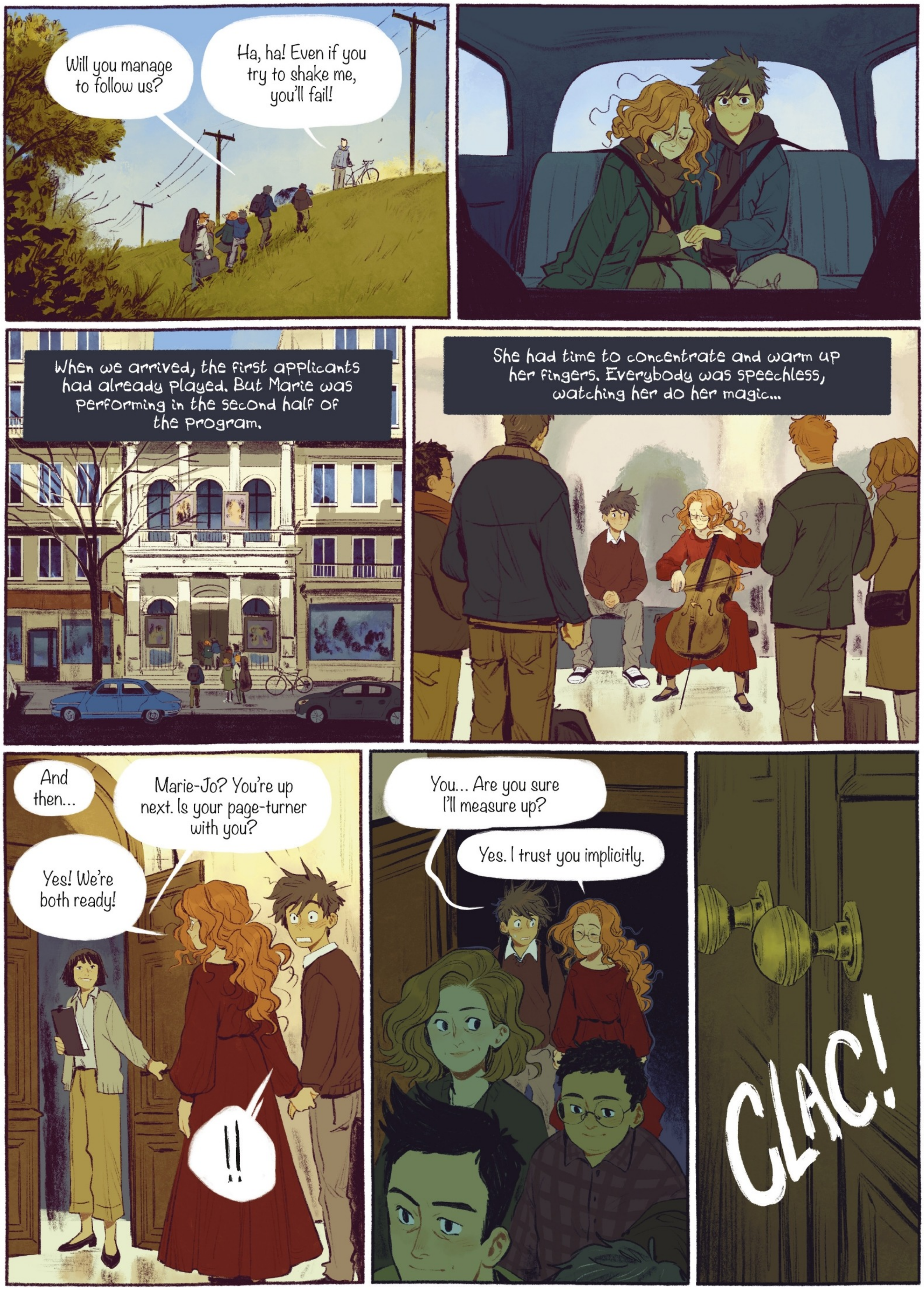

You think they're looking for us right now?
Not yet. They'll wait to see if we come back on our own.
This whole year, you let me borrow your dream. I'll never forget it.
Victor? Can I snuggle against you?
It's no use! It refuses to play!
It's like it's hoarse!
It's alive, you know. I think it caught cold.
Jeez, that thing is so sensitive...
ATCHIIAAA!
Sounds like it's not the only one who caught a cold!
What are you doing?
Checking to see if you have a fever, obviously! But I don't know how to tell how bad it is...

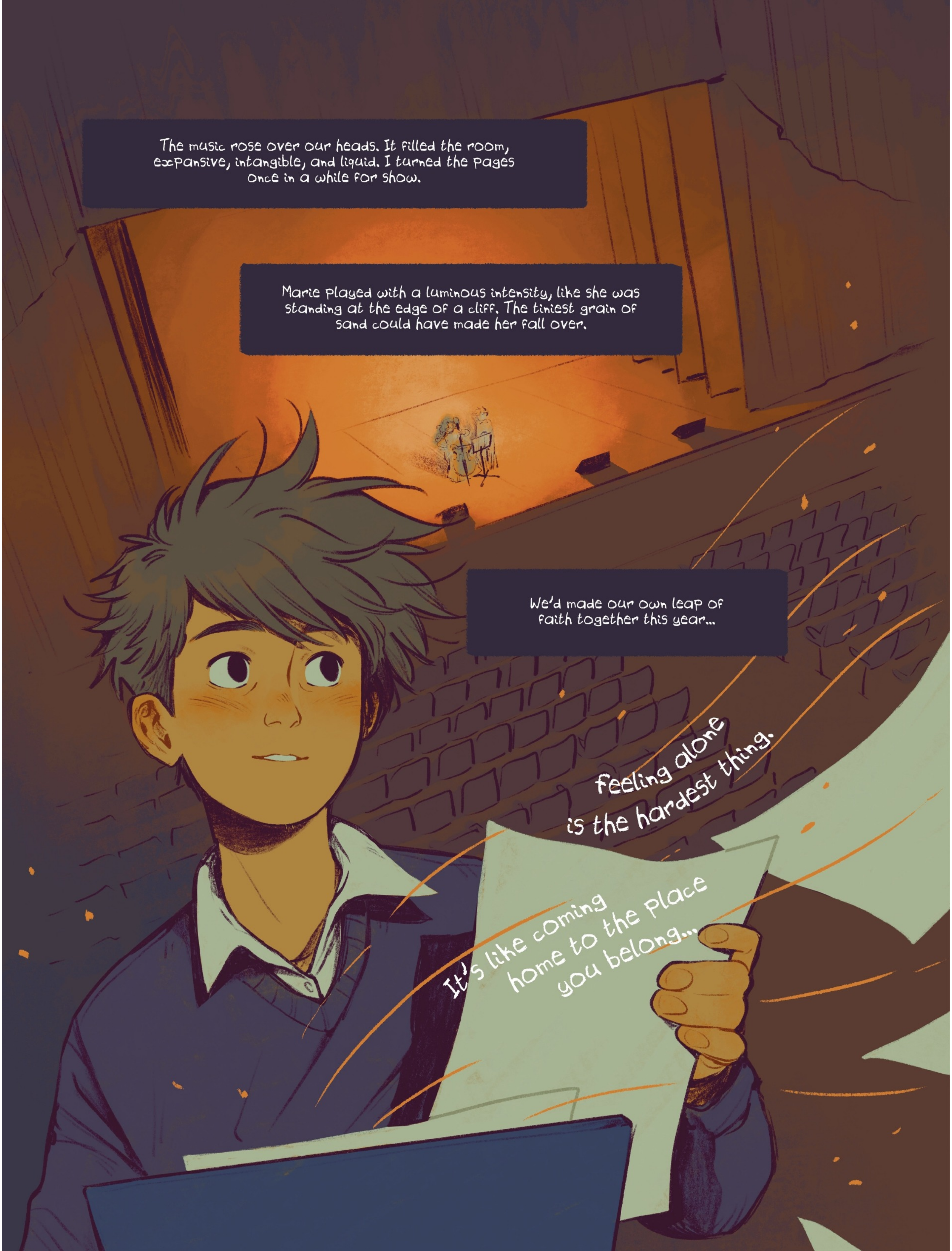

You want to go home?
Are you serious? We didn't come all this way for nothing! We only have one more night to go... We can do it!
ATCHIIAA!!
Dinner's ready. We're having ravioli.
BLEUUAAAARGH!!
We need to go back, Marie! You're not well! You're all pale and you're shaking like a leaf!
At least let me go get some cold medicine! We have to get you feeling better!
No, don't leave... I'll be fine, I promise. It's just a cold, or... the jitters. Yes, it's the jitters!
If you want to pay tribute to Johann Sebastian tomorrow, you have to be in top form! And this cabin is killing you!
All right, go... but only if you promise to sleep hugging me...
PHARMACIE
POLICE

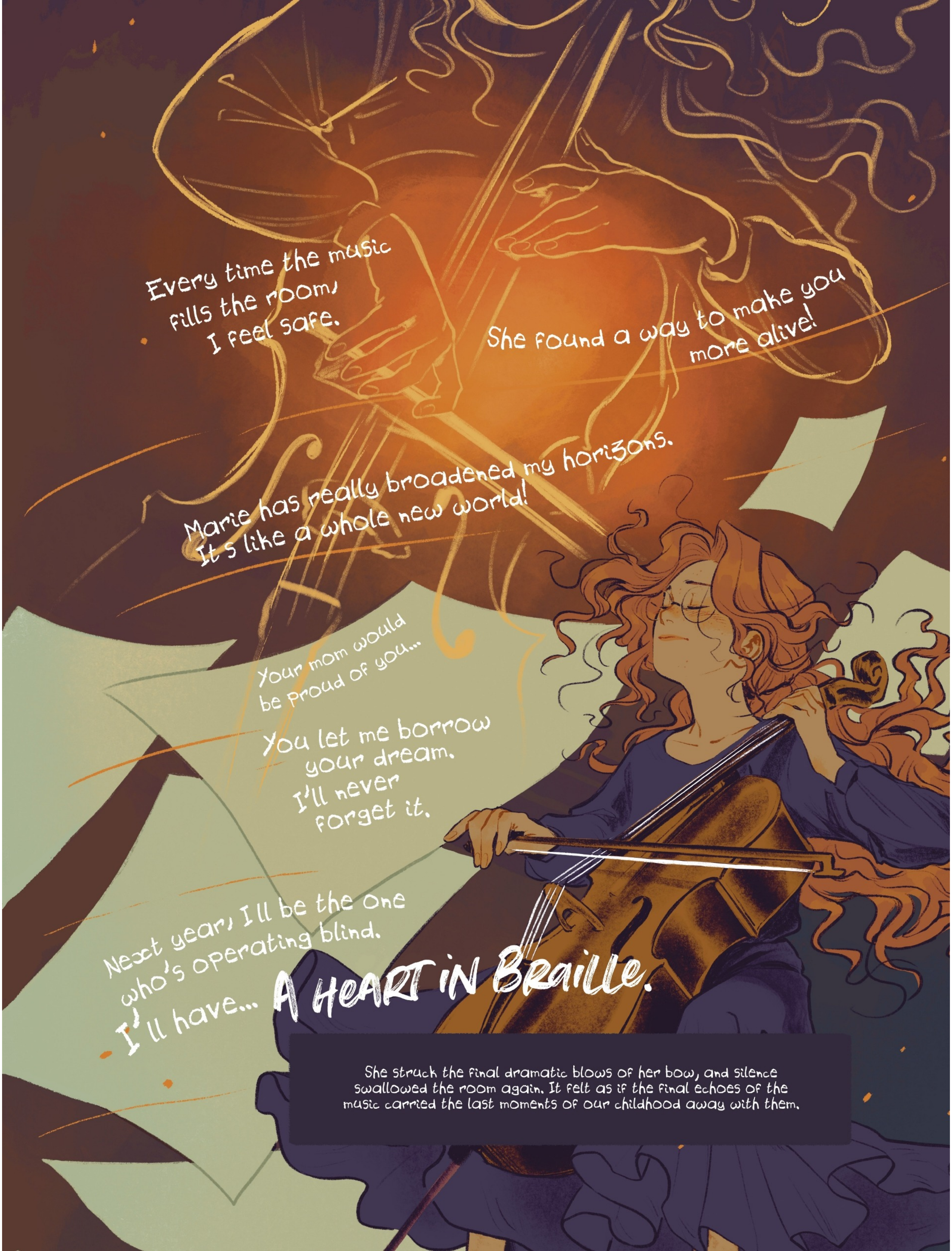

Victor... Snirfl... Is that you?
Yes...
Are you crying? Why?
I didn't measure up... I'm sorry.
I... snirfl... feel like getting back in the bumper cars and eating a candied apple with you...
Me too...
They look terrible! We have to wake them up.


Dad? How did you find us?
Marie-Jo's parents came to see me last night, with the police and people from your school.
It occurred to me to ask Hussein, who told me to talk to the twins. They immediately thought of your cabin.
And Marie's parents...
They know everything now. They're outside.
There he is! What on Earth were you thinking? Bringing my daughter to a place like this!
And making her miss class! I mean, really?!
This little charade is over! We're taking you to the blind school immediately. You can thank us later.
No, no! Please don't!
Dad! You can't let them do it! We have an audition to get to!
What are you talking about?
It's a cello audition! We have the notice! I'm the one turning the pages for her. Not that she needs it!
Not a chance! You're not dragging her anywhere else! Is that clear?
I'm doing this for love, dad... I'm begging you...
I...
Ahem...

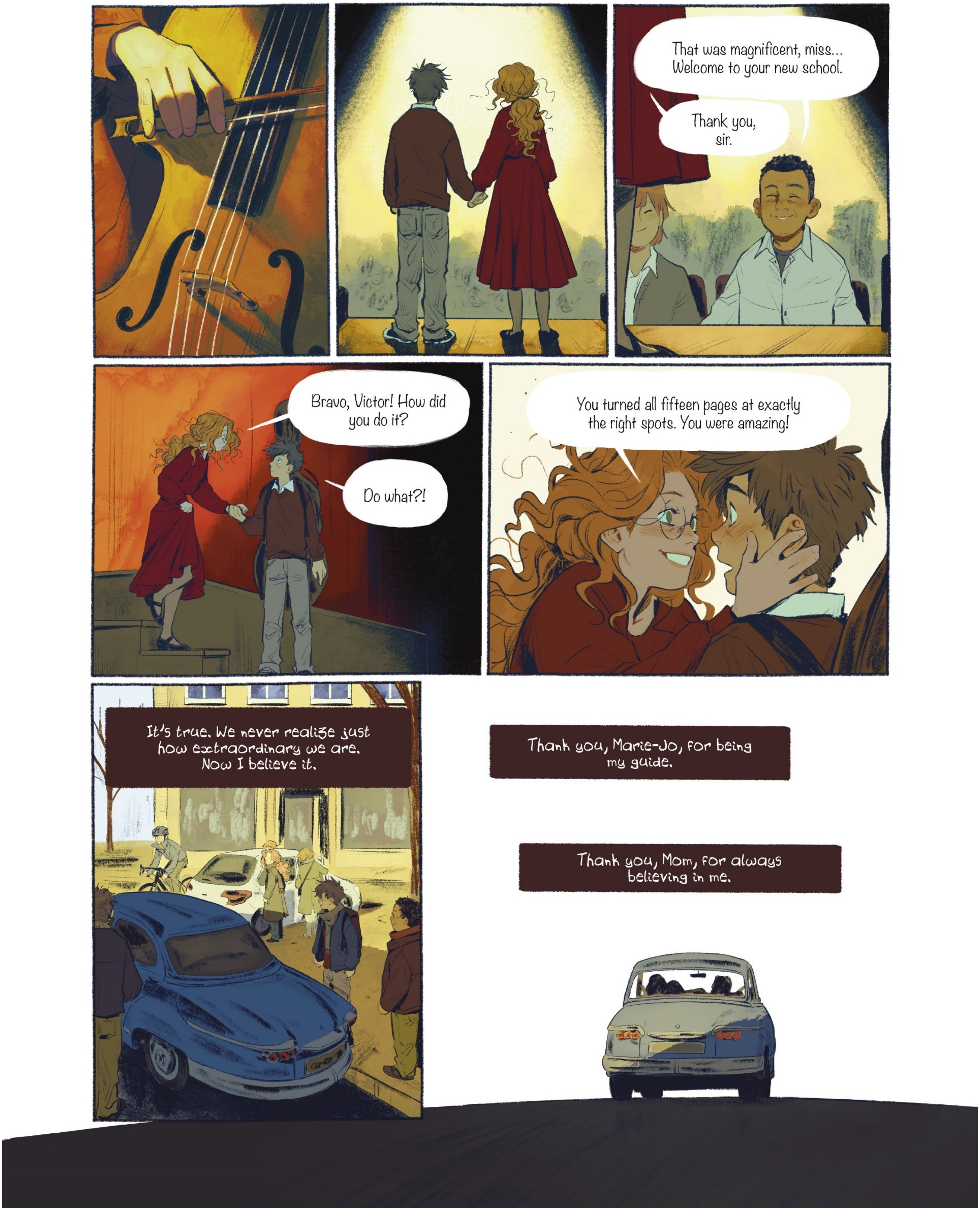

What's happening? Tell me!
A... a miracle!
Come on, Marie! Let's go. You have an important audition to get to. Today's your big opportunity. You can't miss it!
Daddy!
Wait, she can't play in the state she's in!
No time for that. It's already ten-thirty.
Ahem... I might have a solution. I'm in a bike race tomorrow. And... I make a little homemade cocktail...
You take steroids?!
Of course not! It's just some vitamins and health-boosting herbal supplements! Totally all-natural and harmless.
Hmph. Better be.
What did you tell them to get them to change their minds?
Don't worry about it. Just focus on your audition. You still have to get ready.


Will you manage to follow us?
Ha, ha! Even if you try to shake me, you'll fail!
When we arrived, the first applicants had already played. But Marie was performing in the second half of the program.
She had time to concentrate and warm up her fingers. Everybody was speechless, watching her do her magic...
And then...
Marie-Jo? You're up next. Is your page-turner with you?
Yes! We're both ready!
!!
You... Are you sure I'll measure up?
Yes. I trust you implicitly.
CLAC!


The music rose over our heads. It filled the room, expansive, intangible, and liquid. I turned the pages once in a while for show.
Marie played with a luminous intensity, like she was standing at the edge of a cliff. The tiniest grain of sand could have made her fall over.
We'd made our own leap of faith together this year...
Feeling alone is the hardest thing.
It's like coming home to the place you belong...


Every time the music fills the room, I feel safe.
She found a way to make you more alive!
Marie has really broadened my horizons. It's like a whole new world!
Your mom would be proud of you...
You let me borrow your dream. I'll never forget it.
Next year, I'll be the one who's operating blind.
I'll have... A HEART IN BRAILLE.

She struck the final dramatic blows of her bow, and silence swallowed the room again. It felt as if the final echoes of the music carried the last moments of our childhood away with them.


That was magnificent, miss... Welcome to your new school.
Thank you, sir.
Bravo, Victor! How did you do it?
Do what?!
You turned all fifteen pages at exactly the right spots. You were amazing!
It's true. We never realize just how extraordinary we are. Now I believe it.
Thank you, Marie-Jo, for being my guide.
Thank you, Mom, for always believing in me.

A big thank you to Pascal Ruter for allowing me to adapt his wonderful story.
I'd also like to thank Mélanie Perry for her availability, easygoingness, and kindness.
Thank you, Pauline Mermet, for having the patience to wait for THE right story.
A big thank you to Anne-lise Nalin for her talent, which blows me away with every panel.
Lastly, I want to thank my own Victor and his mom for my day-to-day happiness.
I dedicate this graphic novel to Marie-Jo.

Joris

I'd like to thank my family, my parents, my sister, and my friends.
They are always there to make me laugh, listen to me, and drag me out of my cave.
A big thank you to Pascal and Didier Jeunesse for this great experience getting to know Victor and Marie-Jo.
And lastly, I want to thank Joris and Pauline for trusting me to illustrate this wonderful story. They were the best when it came to motivating me and making me feel good about my work. In fact, how about a second helping?

Anne-lise

Based on the novel of the same name by Pascal Ruter, originally published by Didier Jeunesse in 2012. An English translation of the novel, entitled *A Friend in the Dark*, was published in 2017. The translation is by Emma Mandley.

EUROPE COMICS - ALL DIGITAL. ALL EUROPEAN.
www.europecomics.com

This work is published as an e-book under the collective imprint Europe Comics, coordinated by Mediatoon Licensing. For rights queries, please contact Mediatoon at contact.mfr@mediatoon.com, or visit http://www.mediatoon-foreignrights.com.

© 2023 – DARGAUD – Chamblain / Ruter / Nalin
Translation: Montana Kane
Editing: Michelle Parker
Lettering: Cromatik, Ltd.
Original title: Le Coeur en braille, d'après les romans de Pascal Ruter
Originally published in French by DARGAUD in 2023
All rights reserved.
www.dargaud.com
DARGAUD